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DEDICATION

TO MY FELLOW-MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH
OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, ASSEMBLING
IN WESTBOURNE PARK CHAPEL, PADDINGTON,
LONDON; AND TO THE HALLOWED MEMORY
OF HUNDREDS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH
WHO HAVE SHARED OUR FELLOWSHIP,
I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME, WITH EVER-
DEEPENING GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION

JOHN CLIFFORD

October 17, 1858 — *October 17, 1912*



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I

THE DUTY OF JOY¹

"For the joy of the Lord is your strength."—NEH. viii. 10.

FIFTY years ago this morning I gave to the church at Praed Street, which had a little while before welcomed me to the pastorate, these words of Ezra the scribe as a New Year's motto: "For the joy of the Lord is your strength."

That message I took as the keynote of my ministry to the church, with the full conviction that it was my foremost duty to be a messenger of glad tidings to Christian men, a comforter of those who mourn, a healer of the broken in heart, and a mediator of cheerfulness and courage to the discouraged warriors for truth and righteousness.

To that note I have striven to set the music of my ministry during this half-century; and though addressing a very different as well as a much larger audience, and living under changed conditions, yet I feel we cannot start 1909 with a more helpful and quickening message; and therefore once more I speak to you of

¹ Preached on Sunday morning, January 3, 1909.

the *Duty of Joy*, of the obligation to be cheerful and optimistic, based upon the fact that joy—religious joy, joy in God and in God's world, in human life and living, and in the service of humanity—increases the strength of the men in whom it dwells, and also of those who see the face made radiant by its presence, or hear the ringing tones with which it speaks, or share in the gifts of sympathy and help it distributes with saintly grace and divine munificence.

More than ever, dear friends, I believe that the joyfulness of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, and the Ruler of our perplexed and confused lives, contains the true interpretation of life, offers the light we need for our feet, the strength for our moral forces, and the solace for our troubles ; more than ever do I feel that there are the most solid and enduring guarantees for a cheerful outlook on our contradictory human world and a courageous facing of the most exacting tasks in the assurance that "for those who love God all things are working together for good, for those I mean whom with deliberate purpose He has called."

I

Let us begin, then, by noticing that this gladness of heart of which Ezra speaks *springs from a fresh and illuminating conception of God*, and of His keen and abiding interest in our human life.

The people have just heard the word of the Lord read to them anew. The "instruction" of Jehovah

has been recovered and re-introduced into Israel's experience. It is the occasion of the uplift of the law of the Lord, as revealed to His people through the prophets and leaders of the past, to its appointed place in the religious life and thought of the people.

(1) Ezra, the great reformer, with the insight of a true statesman, recognises that Religion is a State-building force ; that the knowledge of God, who is the real Maker of the world and of its cities and states, is *the basis on which a prosperous and happy community must be built* ; the source of strength and the mainstay of its advancement. He knows that the people who are blind to the vision of God will surely perish, and those who forget Him "will be turned into the hell" of hardness of heart, cruelty, and ruin ; that they will lose all goodness, all care for the right, all pity for the poor and needy, all unselfish ideals and all practical beneficence. The Nemesis of the God-forgetting nations is an undeniable argument for the claims of God.

Ezra read the law of the Lord. He is a leader who leads. He does what he wishes the people to do. He leads by example as well as by counsel, by personal influence and direct action. He brings to the newly awakened mind of the community the words spoken at sundry times and in divers manners by the prophets, the messages of 'Abraham and Moses, Joshua and Samuel ; and the warnings and promises written in indelible lines in the sorrows and joys, baffled efforts and fruitful labours, of the successive generations of their predecessors.

It is a great treasure, one of the greatest, for a nation to have the revelation of God in its midst, and for it to be recognised by those in positions of leadership. Queen Victoria rendered a true service to her people when she told the inquiring stranger that the basis of England's greatness was the Bible. It is, not as a book, but as an instruction from God, a disclosing of His character and will, a discovery of the principles and policies of a true Commonwealth; and woe to us if we forget it, or suffer it to be kept apart from our civic and political life. Value your Bible! Keep it an *open* Bible—open to everybody! Never suffer the priest to close it! Master its contents, and work them into the whole life of your fellows all the world over!

(2) But Ezra did more than read "the book." He organised the Levites into a body of instructors of the people in the apprehension of the meaning of what they heard read; and they read the divine instructions distinctly, or with a tone and emphasis that "interpreted" them, and also "gave the sense" of what was read. They enabled the hearers to possess its meaning for themselves; to experience its power to discern the secret thoughts and purposes of the spirit; to stir them to repentance and the confession of their sins; and to lead them to pledge obedience to it as the law and guide of the community.

It is what we *understand*, what we receive into our intelligence, that brings forth fruit. It is the seed sown in the good and honest heart that yields thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. Ideas are forces, and

divine ideas are divine forces; and it is not until we have passed through the door of the word into the inner sanctuary of the thought that we are at the sources of spiritual regeneration and joy.

(3) This instruction carried the people forward to a new thought about God. The God of the Exile is seen as the God of restored or reconstructed Israel; the God who found pleasure in bringing back the wandering pilgrim to his long-forsaken home; the God who, like a father, rejoices in the joys of his children with their newly found pleasures; the God who delights in mercy; with whom there is plenteous redemption; who blots out the sins of men though they are as a cloud, and fills them with the joy of His presence.

The children of the Exile have come back not only to the land and the law, but to the God of the law and the land: to the God of their fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; and to Him in His freshest and latest revelation as the God of joy and blessedness.

Now, you will not fail to note that this revelation is made to and through politicians, statesmen, reformers, the builders of the new commonwealth. It is on the souls of Ezra and Nehemiah this light falls—the governors, the prefects, the generals who restored the glories of Jerusalem. *God does not despise politics if we do.* He does not pass by as unimportant the measures that influence and determine the conditions of three hundred millions of people in India, or ignore the legislation that cripples or frees, saves from wrong or dooms to misery and wretchedness, the forty-five

millions of Great Britain and Ireland! No, far from it! He guides and controls the forces that are so fateful to His children, and inspires the personalities that lead the life of the world—an Alfred, a Cromwell, a Milton, a Gladstone, as He did Ezra and Nehemiah.

Isaiah sees God in His spotless purity, and says the *holiness* of God is your strength. Give thanks at the remembrance of it. It works for the destruction of your sin. It feeds your aspirations for righteousness. David, who has seen the care of Jehovah for men pictured in his own shepherd life, singing "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," teaches that the *shepherdliness* of God is our strength; and so we have found it again and again. Moses, who was led amid all the vicissitudes and contradictions of his varied experiences to the conception of God's eternity, assures us that God is the dwelling-place of His people in all ages, and that in the thought of His *eternity* there is everlasting strength. Abraham writes out his dominating idea of Deity in the words that sound through his soul: "I am the Lord God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." But to Ezra and Nehemiah, men almost forgotten, comes the gladdening revelation of the deep, full, and abiding *joy* of God as the strength of men. Ezra says: "Be generous in your gladness. Celebrate your festivities with exultation and beneficence. Send bounties to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your stronghold."

That thought of God is surely a source of real solace for us as we face the fearful inequalities of life, the misery and degradation, the disease and vice into which so many souls are born, without their will; the anguish and torture we feel as we turn our eyes from the gaping wounds of humanity. For though we cannot understand or explain all, yet since God—the God of righteousness and the God of love, of tenderness and pity—since He is so tranquil, so perfectly blessed, so certainly at rest about the issue of things, all must be right and good, though so much seems to be wrong and bad. I have no better illustration than one I gave long since from my own experience.

Years ago, I went into the operating room of University College Hospital, and saw one of the most skilled of our surgeons removing a limb. It was my first sight of the movement of the surgeon's knife. I could not keep back a shudder. It made me ill to note the writhing of the sufferer as the cruel instrument penetrated the quivering flesh. I looked at the surgeon's face. Not a muscle betokened anxiety. His gaze was steady, his spirit calm. His larger vision of the issues, the beneficent issues, of his work, filled him with strength, steadied his nerve, and delivered him from weakening fear. The sight of his countenance made me strong. I could look to the end in calm self-control. So have I often found an unspeakable consolation in the joy of God. If He, the Lord of this pain-filled, care-laden, sin-fettered life, where misery and sin and shame abound, and the struggle is so keen,

and the strife so dinning—if He is glad and blessed amid all this, it is because He sees and knows all, and I, therefore, may take heart, and be assured that the pains of creation prophesy a freer and fuller life, and the sufferings of the present will work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.¹

The joy of God is a stronghold for us in the day of trouble. “Round our restlessness is His rest.” Out of His serenity come patience and fortitude and hope.

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.”

II

But note further, Ezra is speaking of *the joy of sharing in the reconstruction of social life, of rebuilding the Commonwealth of God, and of forwarding by another and most important stage the missionary work for the world of the God-called and God-led people of Israel.*

The second temple is being erected. The city of God is being restored. The later Judaism is taking shape under the guidance of Ezekiel and Daniel, Nehemiah and Ezra, and the joy that the great scribe

¹ *Daily Strength for Daily Living* contains a sermon of mine on this subject—commencing p. 415.

feels and speaks of is the deep religious joy of reconstructing the shattered fortunes of the community of Israel, of reviving its organised activities and preparing that community for the accomplishment of its mission.

The people did not see this; but it was there. They had not the full programme of God before their eyes. But they were now specially called to take their place in carrying out a portion of it. Israel was being reconstituted. The Jews were working together with God in setting up again in the old land the old religious organisations and the old religious forces of the descendants of Abraham.

It was a great purpose, but the mood in which they were facing it was wrong. They thought the new demand could be met by regret and repentance; by afflicting their souls, calling a fast, and going through all the customary forms of Eastern lamentation and grief. They were depressed by the thought of what they had lost, instead of exulting in what they had regained. The glories of the past shut out of sight the advantages of the present. They grieved over the old home that was empty, desolate, and forsaken, instead of redeeming the time by building the new home. They remembered that they dwelt in the midst of gaping ruins, of fierce persecutors and oppressors, and they could not forbear bewailing their lot and weeping over their sins.

At once the governor Ezra strikes a different note: bids them make high festival, delight in what they

have; "eat the fat and drink the sweet," as though no foe existed and no peril was nigh; "send portions to those for whom nothing was prepared," as though there could be no lack of provisions; clothe themselves with the garment of praise; for this joyful temper, this thankful and hilarious mood, is the necessary strength of the builders of a new world, and the chief power by which they can successfully create a New Jerusalem.

It is so. A man must make melody in his heart if he is to keep to his task through all the vexations and disappointments of his lot as a worker for God. We soon grow weary in well-doing, and must strengthen ourselves in God, who fainteth not, neither is weary, if we are to keep on labouring to bring in the Christ that is to be, to build the New Jerusalem in England's pleasant land. We shall not do our work well unless we sing at it. It is Paul, the man who was rebuilding Europe and Asia, who says out of his own experience, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*, and again I say, rejoice." World-builders, from Ezra and Paul to Abraham Lincoln and General Booth, have been a cheerful, optimistic race. They have declared it is never man's duty to despair of the republic of God; it is every worker's duty to rejoice in hope.

We are taking part in making all things new, and the operation, if we only understand it, will be a strengthening delight. We have to prepare for the production of the new man; the real super-man, the man who attains to the fulness of the stature of manhood in Christ Jesus. We have to create a city without slums

for the poor and perils for the weak; without snares for the unwary and traps for the heedless; without conditions that make virtue impossible, and vice easy and certain; a city of holiness and a city of God. We have to rearrange labour so that it shall cease to be a curse and become an education; take out of it its excess and place within it a beatitude, and so make our very toil the occasion of an ever-heightening good.

Now you cannot do this without brightness and joy. You will soon surrender to fear, or despair, or persecution if you do not drink the wine of gladness. Joy is a duty! Never treat it as an accident or an ornament; as something that you will accept if it arrives, and can dispense with if it does not arrive. Make up your mind that you *ought* to be filled with all the fulness of the joy of God, and think, plan, and live so as to secure it.

III

You will also notice at a glance that this is also *the joy of generous service to others*. "Go to your festivities," says the governor, but in your feasting make room for those who are sitting at an empty table and longing for a satisfying meal. Hallow your day of dedication and thanksgiving by open-handed hospitality. For such an inflow of the luxury of doing good will be a stronghold for you when pursued by the furies of despair.

Joy is expansive, enlarging! It is the spring of magnanimity. Joy fits for service and grows by service. As iron sharpeneth iron, so the countenance of the

joyous man that of his friend. One man's joy is another man's strength, hope, courage, fortitude, cheer. Joy is infectious. It lifts the burdens from the shoulders of the weary. It makes the tired man start again upon his task. It quenches worry. It quiets discontent. It breathes peace on the troubled. You feel it as a force. The joy of the Bible is the strength of men in indescribable degrees and untraceable ways. If only for the gladness it gives, it is worth keeping in circulation. The joy of our hymns overflows into and bears up on tides of gladness thousands of souls every Sabbath day. The joy of the lonely missionary, like Mackay in Uganda, Chalmers in the South Seas, and Gilmour in Mongolia, strengthens depressed hearts in our crowded cities, and nourishes the lonely in our villages.

So highly does Jesus value cheerfulness that He bids us, "if we fast," tell nobody about it. Nay, more, He says: Array yourself in your brightest colours, make your face radiant by your inward cheer; whatever you do, never appear to men to fast. Take your cheerfulness into the street and the market and the sick-room; and keep your gloom and your grumbles to yourself. Keep bright and look bright, and turn all brightness into helpfulness. Dr. Jowett tells us that he was once at the Great Orme's Head, Llandudno, gazing on the glories of sky and sea, when a man standing near him turned and remarked, "Fancy going back to auctioneering after this." Dr. Jowett repudiated the false sentiment thus expressed, for the joys of nature and of life

are given to help us in the actual work of life, to save us from shirking "the daily task," to keep us faithful to the "common round," and to enable us to find room enough for our souls in all the commonplaces of life for denying ourselves and drawing nearer to God.

Jesus gave His own joy to His disciples so that it might remain in them and be a source of power in their service. He always sought to make a disciple a minister, the recipient a distributor, the man who feasts a giver to those for whom nothing is prepared; and therefore He gave of His fulness of joy to His followers. *The deepest note in His nature was not sorrow but joy*, and His joy was at once His own strength and the strength of His men; and accordingly He seeks to make joy the deepest note in the nature of all those who receive Him. He is an optimist Himself, always an optimist, and He creates optimists. He was glad with an exuberant gladness, and said so, when He saw that the revelations of the Father were made to *babes*, to men with childhood's receptivity, to men who carry the instincts of the child, to men of low degree—*i.e.* to the universal man, and not to the exceptional man, the philosopher; to the babes, who are sure to distribute what they receive, and not to the learned and sapient few, who are sure to keep what they get to themselves and their cultured coterie.

For the sake of perfecting the quality and increasing the quantity of our service, joyousness of spirit is one of the foremost obligations of the Christian life.

IV

Another factor in the strength of these returned pilgrims was in *the joy of a rekindled hope*. They were starting on a new course. God had given them a new opportunity, and a bright though not unclouded outlook. They were not free from fears or foes; but they had leaders whom they could trust, promises that had often been fulfilled, and signs of coming good that they could not misread. The showers of trouble were still falling, but the brilliant colours of the rainbow of hope shone through the showers.

How like our own lot this morning! We too are pilgrims setting out on a path that we have not walked heretofore. We have been baffled and bewildered. We have had our losses and separations. Our defects have been many and our perplexities abound. The "Old Home" in which we found our first friendship is ours no longer. The rebuilding of our social life proceeds so slowly that we are not always sure that we are doing any good or making any headway against the intemperance and lies, the godlessness and vice around us.

But this is our stay and our strength. We are in *God's* world. It is not ours. We have not made it. We do not rule it. We can help it or hinder it, but we do not determine its course or fix its issues. It is His. It is not going to ruin. "Change and decay in all around we see"; but change is not final and decay is not fatal. Often the change heralds a

large growth, and decay prepares for a fuller life. Lowell said: "I take great comfort in God. I think He is considerably amused sometimes, but on the whole loves us, and would not let us get at the match-box if He did not know that the frame of the universe is fireproof." That is Lowell's way of telling us that we have nothing to fear from the childish interferences of men; that our Heavenly Father will take care of us; that underneath are the everlasting arms, and that therefore all will be well with the world in the end of the day. And then let us think of Browning's great word: "How soon a smile of God can change the world." *Sursum corda*. Lift up your hearts. Go into the New Year without fear.

"His love in time past forbids us to think
He'll leave us at last in trouble to sink."

That love is certain, whatever else gives way; and in it we may, we must, rejoice.

Victor Hugo says: "When night has once passed into a human soul, it never leaves it, though the stars may rise." Surely it is not so! He knew better who sung, "Unto the upright there ariseth *light* in the darkness." God's rays penetrate the gloom, and at last drive it away. He gives "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of *praise* for the spirit of heaviness." Those are His divine exchanges, and our Heavenly Father delights to make them for His children. It therefore is our duty to say to our souls in every mood of dejection, "Why art thou cast

down? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Joy is our duty. God is joyous in all, and over all, and in spite of all; and we are now, and shall be more completely, partakers of His nature. We cannot do our work well, with masterly efficiency and sureness of result, if we do it grudgingly, or morosely, or gloomily. We must lift it to its highest by a deep, divine, inexhaustible joy. Let us add, then, to our faith and manliness, our knowledge and self-control, our endurance and godliness, our brotherly affection and love, that fruit of the Spirit which is joy; joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement—that is, the reconciliation.

II

THE GOSPEL OF THE HUMANITY OF GOD

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”—Ps. ciii. 13, 14.

“**L**IKE as a father.” The history of religion shows that it has not been easy for men to think of God in that extremely simple and human fashion; and yet, to Christians, no other way of thinking appears so obvious or so natural. It met us in our childhood, grew into the thinking of our youth, and has swayed the conceptions we have formed of that august and invincible power that works for righteousness and peace for evermore. We lisped it in our earliest hymns. It had a place in the first prayers we offered at our mother’s knees. It was set out in many winsome forms in the Sunday school; and when we realised something of the joy of the Divine pardon, we felt more deeply than ever the entire appropriateness and unsurpassed charm of the poet’s words. God is like a father. It saturates the

Christian atmosphere. It is shaping the thought and the life of the world.

And yet it is a matter of historic fact that men were thinking and inquiring for ages before they were able to interpret God in the terms of human fatherhood. Groping after God, if haply they might find Him, they sought their symbols first of all in the many-leaved picture-book of nature, and said, God is like the sun, shining in his strength, and filling the world with his radiance. The moon is His symbol as it casts its light on the path of the pilgrim in the night. "God is like the rock," they exclaim; "His work is perfect." He abides amid the storms and stress of life, stable as the everlasting hills.

The Assyrians, after they had expressed their thoughts of the Eternal in the great triad of the heavens, the earth, and the atmosphere, turned their attention, as the treasures of our British Museum remind us, to the beasts of the field in their strength and the birds of the air in their flight, to the ox, the lion, and the eagle, for images by which they might figure the attributes of that mysterious Power which they felt to be everywhere and manifold, and yet could not understand.

Quite late in history did men come to the human in their quest for the terms in which they might express God; and when they came, they seized at first only upon the more arresting qualities of the animal in man, and said, "God is like Hercules" in the invincible strength with which He crushes the

evils in the world, and makes an end of them. Later still, Plato advanced to the suggestion that God was like a "geometer," a thinker and fashioner, full of ideas and ideals; and, latest of all, in one of the youngest portions of the Old Testament, not in Genesis, not in any part of the Pentateuch, but in that wonderful and most gracious lyric, the 103rd Psalm, possibly one of the last contributions of Hebrew Psalmody, that the seer surpasses all the great historical religions, and pictures God to us as a pitiful, compassionate, sin-forgiving, and soul-healing Father, and thus supplies the basis for the most true, most worthy, and most inspiring conception of God.

I

This gospel of the essential and perfect humanity of God springs out of the man's grateful review of his deepest experience. He is face to face with his own life, and with the life of Israel. He looks back in his history, and counts up the "benefits" he has received from the Lord: forgiveness and healing, solace and renewal, quickening and uplift. He is swayed by the spirit of praise and adoration and love; and out of his own growing affection there leaps up irresistibly this thought of God. It must be so. The God who meets his sin with such pity and pardon, bears with his errors and guilty ignorance so patiently, must have the heart of a father. These are the gifts of love. They reveal wisdom, intelligence, adaptation of means to an end,

but chiefly they show the same sort of care for the soul of man that a loving father shows for his child ; they disclose the Divine heart. God forgives as a father does the mistakes and follies and sins of his son. He delivers from peril, He crowns with loving-kindness and tenderness. He satisfies the soaring desires of the spirit ; He renews the springs of life. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

Moreover, he sees that God has made him a partner in the great life of Israel ; put him to school to Moses and Samuel and David, and a long succession of prophets ; given him a goodly heritage in the Hebrew commonwealth, in the wondrous issues of its successes and defeats, its training and trials, its wealth of thought and conscience, faith and hope. Just as a father who knows his son seeks to draw out the forces in him, places him where he can get the best mental and spiritual nourishment, so that he becomes in every fibre of him a true man, so God had given him a place in the life of the great, progressive, and conquering race, where, under the special training of the Eternal Spirit, and chastened and corrected by His ministry, he had manifold opportunities of advancing from strength to strength and from service to service.

But the most vital element in his experience is the forgiveness of his sins. It is to that he recurs again and again. God forgives as only a father-heart in its fullest flow of pity and compassion can forgive. For it is not easy to forgive. Brothers have been known

to pursue one another in a spirit of retaliation for years, and some fathers and mothers have shown hardness of heart towards their own offspring; but God forgives with a generosity and completeness that show that no father has a love so large as His.

“Who is a pardoning God like Thee,
Or who has grace so rich and free!”

It seems impossible to exaggerate in describing it. Listen to the singer as, with soul bursting with thankfulness, he says, God does chide—but not always; nor does He keep His anger for ever. Take your measuring-glass and look up into the heavens. Let your gaze reach out to the farthest depths of the infinite blue, soar and still soar, and still you do not reach the boundaries of His forgiving love: “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.”

Measure again. Start with the dawn, and stretch your tape to the uttermost sunset, and yet you have not covered the distance to which God puts the sins that would bar us from union and communion with Himself. Verily the eye of the seer is fixed on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. He is in the presence of the Spirit of Christ; he grasps, if only for a brief moment, yet surely he grasps something of the meaning of Calvary.

In another greatly daring line the writer completes

his representation of the father-like action of God. It is a very human scene that he brings before us. A father is chiding his son. He is ready to allow the whole penalty annexed to the wrong that has been done to fall on the offender. It is his desert. Let him suffer. Why should he not? No, no, says the father, as "he bethinks himself"; that is the singer's thought—he "bethinks himself," calls to mind, that the sinner is a frail mortal, a weak creature, broken in spirit by his failures, breathing pestilential air, and so—

"Like as a father pitieth his children,
So the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.
For He knoweth our fame;
He remembereth we are dust."

So His perfect knowledge of us—of the plague of our hearts, of the sin which so easily besets us, and of our cowardly surrenders—does not excite His contempt, but stirs His pity! How different from our behaviour! We are tempted to despise ourselves the more we know of our own hearts, of our meanness and wickedness, of our sinful desires and want of faith. We are tempted to lose heart and give up the struggle; but He, who knows all the evil that is in us, knows us always and all through; it is He who encompasses us with His presence, and from whom separation is impossible; He is not hard with us, but ministers to us in our weakness, comforts us in our distress, and saves us with an everlasting salvation. We fathers and mothers never fully know our children, and yet we can feel the

force of this reasoning ; and if we, being limited in our knowledge, yet " bethink ourselves " of the frailty of our offspring, how much more will He pity them that fear Him, since He knows their frame, and remembers that they are dust !

II

But I imagine that you are thinking that this gospel of the fatherhood of God needs a firmer and fuller expression than is given in this Psalm. You ask, Are we not still within the narrow confines of Judaism, even though we have soared into its highest altitudes ? Is not this limitation of the pity of God to them that " fear Him " a witness that the singer is still cabined and confined within the boundaries of race, and has missed the very teaching for which he has been sent into a strange land ? Is he not still thinking of the covenant with Abraham, and imagining that God is the God of the Jews only, and cares only for the Israelites ?

" Towards them that fear Him." The words take much of the grace out of the simile ! They restrict its range ! They show that the conception of the humanity of God has not reached its final expression, and constitute a call for Christ to cleanse it of all racial prejudice and carry it out to the fullest stretch of the great heart of the Eternal Father. For we love Him because He *first* loved us. " We fear Him " because He first forgave the iniquity of our sin. " There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be

feared, and plenteous redemption that Thou mayest be sought unto." The pity of God is not stirred by our merit; but our merit, if we have any, is created by His pity. The Divine pardon is not bestowed because of our amended lives, but our amendment of life follows upon and is inspired by God's free pardon. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses. Jesus gives a fresh setting to this parable of the Divine care, and authorises us to say, Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth *them that fear Him not*.

What else do we mean when we say that Jesus is the revelation of God—the most complete, magnetic, quickening, and inspiring presentation of the Father to man; so complete that He can say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"? The Word was made flesh; made human, and of the universal human, not merely of the Jewish human; and it is the universality and fulness of the human in Christ that casts its spell over us, and wins us to union and communion with Him. It is not that He is an artist in speech, and says lovely things in an unforgettable way; or that He is a doer of heroic and beautiful deeds; or that He is a picturesque figure in the history of the world. No: it is His pity, His exhaustless compassion, His matchless sympathy with man—with lost man, suffering and sinful man—irrespective of his class and station, his culture and rank; it is His hearty comradeship with the toilers of Galilee, His frank and fearless acceptance of the outcast and reprobate, His eager confidence in

the man who comes with honest doubt in the secrecy of the night to talk with Him about his soul; it is this that gives Him His place in the heart and over the wills of men, and compels us to take as the key to His entire revelation, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord loves the world and sends His Son for its redemption." Sir Oliver Lodge said the other day that if he were asked what was the essential element in Christianity he should say, "the Divinity of man and the humanity of God"; I should add, to complete the statement, "and Jesus as the Revealer of both."

This simple expression, interpreting God in the terms of human fatherhood, and made potent for evermore by Jesus Christ, determines the spirit and aim of the life of the churches of Christ. "Be imitators of God as dear children," is the counsel of Paul. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Church must pity men." Brother officers, elders, deacons, Sunday-school teachers, and members all, is this church father and mother to men? Does it throb with pity and tenderness towards men who have lost God, lost faith in themselves and in duty, in the goodness and order of the world, in the certainty of retribution, in the triumph of right, and in the redemption of mankind? I look back to my early years, and think of the church that welcomed me to its heart as a youth. It was a true guide to me. It was a sphere of work and worship, of inspiration and solace. To the incomputable values of fatherly counsel and motherly sympathy and love I found in my home, there were added the shield and defence, the

occupation and friendships, the training of my intellectual and social faculties, by a church that was both father and mother to me. Are we doing the same? Is it said of us, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so this church pities the poor and woebegone, shelters the exposed, protects the imperilled, guides the perplexed, trains the young, solaces the sorrowful, saves the lost, acts as a Greatheart towards sinful men leaving the City of Destruction, and on their way to the land of Beulah"? Is that the verdict of those who know us best?

The churches of Christ are always in danger of losing their humanity. They try hard to be great ecclesiastical organisations instead of homes; to become imposing officials, rather than spiritual fathers and mothers; to sharpen the wits of philosophers in the creation of theological systems, instead of quickening the sense of human friendship and enriching men by love. It is easier far to keep our theology than our humanity, our creeds than our sympathetic and glowing fellowships; yet we all know that Arthur Hugh Clough is right when he sings—

"When all is said that can be said,
The heart still overrules the head,"

and it is waste and folly for the churches to forget it.

It is the human that tells. He "who is most man works best for man," says Mrs. Browning. Charles Lamb is eternally charming because he is so intensely human. It is, then, "this human, this too human,

creature that comes so close to our hearts, whom we love and reverence." All the really great souls have wrought the best work in the world by this quality of pathos, tenderness, and loving sympathy for all that belongs to humanity. The Church must be human enough for the *social* part of man, as well as thoughtful enough for his intellect; and pitiful enough for the sorrows and sins of men, as well as strenuous enough in insistence on righteousness for the conscience of men. Man is made for brotherhood. He grows by it, and we shall lose our grip of men if we think too much of their critical temper and too little of their social needs; or provide for their love of justice, and do not meet their weaknesses and sorrows, miseries and tragedies, with genuine compassion and helpful sympathy.

Who will copy God? London is full of lost, sinful, suffering souls. In these millions there are thousands hungering for a word of fatherly guidance, of motherly compassion! Who will rise and make faith in God a little easier? Who will brush away the mists of despondency? Who will scatter seeds of kindness? Who will speak out the good news of the fatherly pity of God? God commendeth His love toward us in that He calls us to announce His redeeming purpose and work, and to bring to His side lost sheep for whom the Shepherd died.

III

HOSEA'S MESSAGE FOR OUR DAY

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Achor for a door of hope : and she shall make answer there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."—Hos. ii. 14, 15.

THIS is Hosea's "exceeding great and precious promise" for men in trouble. It is the prophet's gospel—his teaching as to the ways we must take to reach the highlands of the spiritual life from the valleys of affliction and humiliation.

Hosea is a patriot prophet sorely distressed by the condition of his fellow-countrymen. They are suffering for their sins. A long period of material prosperity has issued in the degradation of their ideals, the enfeeblement of their faith, and the destruction of their loyalty to the God of their fathers. They are sunk in idolatry, and must needs bear the penalties of their transgressions. They are led into the wilderness, separated from the fertile fields and prosperous farms, from the customary comforts and simple joys of social life, subjected to hardship and penury, and driven into

the gloom of deep ravines instead of dwelling on the sunny, wind-swept uplands of their fatherland.

But, the prophet tells them, God is in their trouble. It is He who has led them into the "wilderness." This is the Lord's doing. These penalties are His appointment, and it is because He rules their life and loves them that they are subjected to these chastisements. Yea, He has brought them into these desolate spaces "to make love to them," to speak comfortably to them, to win them back to Himself, to restore their allegiance to duty, to prepare them for, and conduct them to, a better future; to make the Vale of Achor—that is, "the Valley of grief"—a doorway of hope, a valley of teaching and training; yea, a valley of songful triumph which shall lead to the broad tablelands of communion with the God of forgiveness and love.

The promise of the Valley of Achor for a doorway of hope is a poet's figure, and rich in suggestion. For the gorge to which he refers calls up some of the gloomiest associations of Israel's life. Worse than Sedan and Waterloo to the French is Achor to Israel! It is the spot where Achan fell into transgression and involved his people in a succession of defeats. Its memory was a menace. The name chronicled wrong and failure, disaster and death. Evil omens crept amongst its stones and bushes. And yet, so full is the faith of the prophet in God, and in the gospel He has given him, that he tells the people of God that at the very worst spot in the wilderness of their experience

there is a door of hope; that God Himself leads them and woos them, and therefore the dark vales of sorrow, as in times past, will become a school of illumination and discipline, a preparation for a purer and larger life, for a truer conception of God, for more affectionate and quickening relations to Him, for the ascent of men to the highlands of spiritual peace and spiritual joy and spiritual service.

I

Now note that Hosea's gospel recognises the reality of the trouble, and meets it with a real solace. He does not minimise the pressure that is upon Israel, or seek to disguise from them that the penalties from which they are now suffering are penalties inflicted by God. There are people whose troubles are nearly all imaginary, and it would be well for them if they could have a few real ones. They are dream troubles; they come out of their forecasts of the future, are not based upon accurate and careful observation, nor upon the presence of real causes of sorrow. These people cripple themselves by yielding to the tyranny of these imaginings. Still, for most of us trouble is a reality, and we never learn the geography of our personal planet completely until we have gone through a spiritual Valley of Achor. At some time or other we find a deep gorge opening in front of us, into which we have to go. God is infinitely wise and good and holy, and He has so fixed the order of our living that it is almost impossible for us to escape the burden of

sorrow, the afflictions, the trials of human life. It is well for us to recognise their reality, and to remember that some of these afflictions come from God. He does not afflict willingly, but He does afflict; and to know that God has "led us into the wilderness," that He is detaching us from all, or from most, of our former joys, and that He has placed us in this land of penury and of want, that He Himself has brought us here—well, to know that is to get very near to the gospel, is to be within earshot of the good news from the very heart of the Eternal.

The Valley of Achor runs through the life of the world. Trouble is not young. The story of the earth is full of tragedy. Sin and penalty crowd into the experience of man. God leads us into struggle and difficulty. We ought to be glad, and we *are* glad when we are wise, that it is part of the order of human living that God does not suffer us always to be in the presence of a weakening, enervating, and destructive prosperity. When we have been emasculated by our continuous successes, He breaks the thread, and flings us upon defeat, so that we may learn that our truest success is in character, not in fortune; in the building up of manhood, not in accumulation of coin; in the discipline of the will and the subordination of our spirit to Him, and not in fleeting and transitory pleasures. Hosea does not try to hide from us that the Valley of Achor is a valley of trouble by calling it by some other name. You do not change facts by changing the terms in which you describe them; and

though you may assert that the sorrow is unreal, that it is entirely imaginary, if the iron is going into your soul all such assertions will be simply an increase of irritation and pain. We cannot, when the pressure is heaviest, and the burden is bearing us down to the earth so that we cannot stand on our feet—we cannot accept illusory terms, as if, forsooth, they altered actual facts. No! trouble is a reality in life. The sin that causes the trouble, that is the spring of it, that makes the penalty inevitable, that compels, if I may so speak, the God of righteousness and order to inflict it, is a horrible reality—a “moral catastrophe.” No Oscar Wilde painting will do for us; we must treat it for what it really is, and then, and then only, is there a chance of our hearing and welcoming the good news of redemption.

II

Again, Hosea, besides recognising the reality of the trouble, attributes the awakening of the mind to the recognition of the object of the trouble—*i.e.* to the illumination of God. “I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak comfortably to her, and I will make of the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”

I say that God does afflict, though He does not afflict willingly. The compulsions of God are the sources of the penalties that overtake sin. The Heavenly Potter has the clay in His hands. He moulds and shapes it into a vase of richest beauty, but it must go into the

seven-times heated furnace to be baked in order that it may abide a thing of beauty for ever; and since it is to be perfect, the heat must be at the highest: the better the vase, the intenser the flame. The husbandman will prune the branches of the vine so that they may bring forth more fruit. The teacher will subject the pupil to exacting tasks so that his faculties may be drilled, that he may get the mastery of himself, and be able to use himself precisely as he wants. So God says, "I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak comfortably unto her." I will utter words of soothing, messages that dispel fear, glad tidings that create faith and hope, and so win her back again to Myself.

The prophet is talking out of his own heart, is laying that heart bare. This is the utterance of experience; he is telling us what he himself has gone through. He had married a sweet and lovely girl in her purity and charm, and she had become an unfaithful wife. She that had been the guardian of his home, the spring of his happiness, the source of his strength, was disloyal; she was an adulteress, and the man's heart was rent, and in anguish he looked up to God. But how had he borne it? He had come out of the great tribulation, and washed his robes and cleansed his heart from all hatred and revenge, and ascended to loftier heights of spiritual power than ever he had known before, to larger conceptions of God's pity and love. The Valley of Achor—that is, the valley of troubling—had been the door through which he ascended to the highlands of

the spiritual order—the heavenly places of God. One of our best teachers says—

“He saw God in the tragedies of his life. He heard the voice of God in the sorrow and shame of his own home; and so, led by the love he still bore to his sinful wife, he became the messenger of divine love and mercy to God’s sinful people.”

Thus Wellhausen interprets the experience and action of the prophet. Yes, it was through the prophet’s tear-filled eyes that he gained this vision, this fresh and helpful vision of God. It was because his own heart was broken with the grief that came into his own home that he was able to receive the message of the infinite pity and tenderness, the compassion and forgiveness of God, and could take to Israel in its trouble and sorrow the glad tidings of God’s great redeeming love. The man laid bare his own soul, the tragedy of his life, and translated it into a gospel for Israel. He had been led into the wilderness, and God had made love to him afresh, spoken comfortably to him, given him vineyards where he had looked for a desert, and songs of victory where he expected lamentation and death; and now he finds in those experiences the material and motive of his evangel. God has turned the Valley of Achor into a passage through which he has ascended into the highlands of the spiritual life; and as God has done for him, so He will do for Israel. Therefore he cries: “Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God. He is your Leader; He

has taken you out of your prosperities and given you these hungers, these yearnings, these achings for something better and greater, and He will bring you at length into the full enjoyment of His revelation."

It is the utterance of one man's experience, but it is the one great gospel written right away through the experience of men. Touch human life at any point, and you come upon it. Wherever that life is real, and in precisely the measure in which it ascends to the highest, so you find the clear, rest-giving language of this gospel. Moses goes into the wilderness, and God woos him for forty years. God is teaching him, preparing him for his great emancipating and nation-building work. The wilderness, his Valley of Achor, is a preparation for those forty years of work for the world that he does with such splendid success after he is eighty years of age. Joseph is thrust into the Valley of Achor! It is a prison. God leads him there, and God is with him in the Valley of Achor, and brings him out and puts him upon a throne of service to Egypt and Israel at once: he has got to the highlands. Where does your sweetest, your most inspiring song come from? From the Book of Psalms. "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." It is the song of a soul won

back to God. Scarcely is the great pattern Man baptized and dedicated to His great reforming and revolutionary work before He is summoned into the wilderness. Led of the Spirit He goes, and for forty days is tempted of the devil; and then He is led out to the uplands of His service, and on them He distributes the good seed of the kingdom, and their harvests fill the world.

John Bunyan, in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, talking about the Valley of Humiliation, says that "it is the most fruitful valley that ever crow flew over." So it is. Where do we look when we want to feed our faith—when we ask for something that shall enable us to set our feet down firmly, to stand loyal to our conviction, true to our principle? Where do we look? We go back to the Valleys of Achor; see the men who suffer like heroes, passing through, rising high; doing their work whole-heartedly; and we are stiffened in conviction and sustained in conflict. Yes. "Call to remembrance the former generations," look into your Puritan gospels, turn over the history of the Free Churches, and what do you come upon? Valleys of Achor. The greatest, the best souls go through them, and go through to the widest service of mankind. John Morley asks—

"To what quarter in the large historic firmament can we turn our eyes with such certainty of being stirred and elevated to thinking better of human life, and of the worth of those who have been most deeply penetrated by its seriousness, as to the annals of those intrepid spirits whom the Protestant doctrine of the

indefeasible personal responsibility brought to the front in the sixteenth century in Germany, and in the seventeenth century in Scotland?"

Yes, despise the Puritan as you may to-day, when you want to get at a real man—a man with a soul in him, capable of doing Divine work—you go to the Puritans of the seventeenth century; you go back to the wilderness into which God led them; you see them there; and as you see them, you become ashamed of the meanness and cowardice that afflict our times, and you ask for grace that you may play the man!

In one of the cells of Newgate in the year 1592 a coffin was placed with this inscription upon it: "This is the corpse of Roger Rippon, a servant of Christ who is the last of sixteen or seventeen which that great enemy of God, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with the High Commissioners, have martyred in Newgate, within these five years, manifestly for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Come along to the reign of Charles II., and note that more than eight thousand persons died in confinement as a penalty for their dissent. I wonder whether, when you are riding on the top of a 'bus and going by the Marble Arch, you ever have any visions? I scarcely ever go that way without. It is one of the sacred spots of our country. Concerning that particular spot, I read that within one hundred yards of the Marble Arch, "Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, charged with holding opinions which impugned the queen's

ecclesiastical supremacy, and conducting worship contrary to law, were doomed to die by the hands of the common hangman; and when the ropes had been fastened to their necks, and the bitterness of death seemed past, a reprieve was sent, not in good faith, but in mockery; and on the next day they had again to summon up their Christian fortitude, thus paying the penalty of a twofold death for their allegiance to conscience and to God." Our Churches were born and nourished in the Valley of Achor; and the valley has been and still is the doorway of hope for liberty and justice, for order and progress, for righteousness and peace—both for our own country and for the world.

It is in the wilderness that men grow to the tallest stature and develop the most splendid heroism. "Darkness shows us worlds of light we never saw by day." I remember well at the beginning of my experience as a pastor being wonderfully fortified by coming into contact with a modern Puritan, a true hero, who, in consequence of his loyalty to conscience, had been driven out of his farm, lost nearly the whole of his goods, and soon after that had to stand at the open grave of his wife; and again, later, had to see the auctioneer's hammer knock down the old arm-chair and other precious things, and then he had to become dependent on others; and yet that man said,—I hear it now as though it were only yesterday,—“The Lord hath done great things for me, whereof I am glad.” “I was brought low, and He helped me. My heaviest troubles have been my best friends, and the things

that went directly against me have been made to work together for my good." "What," I said, thinking of the history as I knew it, "what great things?" And his answer in brief was this: "He helped me to be true to Him." That is the greatness, that is the upland! The soul has found in the Valley of Achor a door of hope, and it has gone up to the highlands of Christian heroism, of Christian devotion. Oh, friends, let us believe that God is in the valley. Let us not be afraid of Achor. It is repellent, I know, by its gloom and its rough stones, but foot it bravely. It is Bethel! Bunyan says that Christian's mistake was this, that in the Valley of Humiliation he forgot God; and because he forgot God, he had to fight the devil. Just so. Remember God, keep Him in view, grasp His hand, and the devil slinks off. Forget God, and the devil comes on, and Apollyon has to be faced. Are you in the Valley of Humiliation? Dear friends, do you remember that, as with the Hebrew youths in the furnace there was one like unto the Son of God, so in the Valley of Achor there is One who has led you into the wilderness, brought you to this ravine, and will take you right through it, will give you a doorway of hope in it, speak to you in His most comforting words, put a new song into your mouth, and will lead you on to the highlands of Christian life and experience.

Perhaps there is someone here this morning in the valley who sees no door, whose sin is a blinding burden, whose distrust of God is an affliction, whose consciousness of wrongdoing, persisted in again and again, steels

the heart against all feeling; who cannot repent, and thus shrinks from trusting in the mercy of God. Christ comes into that valley with this one word to you: "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee: go in peace; sin no more." In that Valley of Achor, that valley of sin, there is a door of hope, and Christ Jesus is that door, and by Him everyone that believeth is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses.

III

There are two other things I want to say to you very briefly, and the first is this. Hosea's gospel ought certainly to constrain us to dismiss all fear when we ourselves are in the Valley of Achor. Let us believe that the meaning of life is discipline, training, the formation of character; not happiness, except as the result of holy living. It will be worth untold gold to believe that, and thereupon cease avoiding the difficult duty, shirking the onerous task, the educating responsibility. It is not by treating life's duties as if they were trifles, and its difficulties as though they were trivial, that a young man masters himself, gains the power of handling the forces of which he is possessed, and turns the stupendous chasms of life into doorways to the mansions of blessedness. Do not seek the easy path, I say again, and I say it to myself, for I hold that the besetting sin of Englishmen in this twentieth century is that of always shirking difficulties, getting

out of the way of burden-bearing, of carrying responsibility—that is our besetting sin. Young men and young women, do not covet the place that demands the least. It is a policy that means ruin: it starves the intellect, poisons the conscience, enervates the will, and destroys manhood. Have you come into an easy place? Has your father or your mother left you money? Is there no demand on you for work, for hard work? If there is a demand upon you for hard work, be faithful and do your work like a man; but if there is not, if your life is easy, then I beg you, remember other people's difficulties, burdens, and problems. Take them upon yourself, for your own sake, to get any little bit of manhood out of you that is in you. Take them up, go into the wilderness; go there for the purpose of helping those who are in trouble if you are not yourself in trouble, and by that process train yourself for serving your generation according to the will of God. Do not be afraid of welcoming difficulty. It is the flail that gets the chaff off the corn. "Difficulty is," as a poet tells us, "the salt of life"; it preserves it from putrefaction and death. It will be your education, your expansion, your best aid in attaining the highest manhood.

My last word is this. Hosea found his gospel where he found God—in himself; but he did not keep it to himself. He gave it to others. He turned the materials of his own experience into the means by which he became a Barnabas, a son of consolation. We have never done all we ought to do with our

afflictions until we have converted them into good news for others. That is part, if not the primary part of the meaning, of the burdens we have to carry, the temptations we have to resist, and the severe tasks we have to perform. For, bad as our lot may be, it is not unlikely we are living in the neighbourhood of somebody whose conditions are far worse than ours. Hosea himself was a door of hope to Israel. The gospel we have learned under God's gracious tuition ought to be expressed in our own way, set in our own forms, for the help, encouragement, salvation, and inspiration of others. That was the way Hosea dealt with his sorrows. Let us deal in like fashion with our tribulations, and then our lives will be a forceful persuasion to men to trust in God, to live in the light of His countenance and the possession of His peace.

IV

ELIJAH PREPARING FOR NEW WORK

“He went unto Horeb, the mount of God. . . . And God said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.”—
1 KINGS xix. 8-11.

ELIJAH went to Horeb, the mount of God. He needed God. The need was acutely and overwhelmingly felt. He had ignobly failed in what seemed the most dazzling success of his prophetic career, and his heart was filled with bitterness and despair. His splendid victories on the heights of Carmel had turned to ashes in his mouth. He was ashamed, bewildered, and dismayed. His life was a ghastly failure. He would fain shuffle off this mortal coil, and escape, for once and all, the gnawing memories of his yesterdays. But, goaded and guided by his spiritual instincts and associations, he starts for the spot associated with the name and experiences of the first great leader of Israel, for the historic Horeb, whose summit was called the Mount of Moses, and whose heaven-piercing peaks were aflame with the revelations of the Eternal.

To what better school could Elijah go than to that

in which Moses was so successful a pupil? What scenes could be more sacred or suggestive? Surely there, if anywhere, the weary spirit might find God; there, if anywhere, he might repeat his visions of Jehovah, hear the call to fresh service, and renew the smouldering fires of his zeal! There, in those wide solitudes with their penetrating silence, and in the presence of those austere hills; there, where Moses had come charged with the painful recollections of his own failure, through yielding to the fierce impulse to slay the Egyptian; there, where he had seen the bush that burned, and burned, and still burned, and yet was not consumed, and from the midst of it had received anew his commission to deliver Israel from all its iniquities, and, clad with the might of God, defied Pharaoh and led the chosen people to the borders of the land—there Elijah too, might cleanse his spirit, fit himself for fresh work, or take up his old task with a larger wisdom and a purer aim, repair the errors of the past, and fill the future with nobler deeds for the vindication and advancement of the religion of Israel.

Therefore he went to Horeb, “far from the madding crowd” of the idolatrous people, and the taunts and threats of Ahab and his queen; and heard the welcome invitation to “stand upon the mount before the Lord.” Nature is God’s temple. The whole earth is the Lord’s, and it is filled with His glory. “Earth’s crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.” But the holiest of the holy is some such

spot as that where Jacob wrestled with the angel, and won from him something of the wondrous meaning of his name; where Jesus suffered for us men, and won for us an everlasting redemption. "Nature is indeed the 'living garment' of God. Sweeter than day-spring to the shipwrecked in Nova Zembla; ah! like the mother's voice to her little child that strays bewildered, weeping, in unknown tumults; like soft streamings of celestial music to my too exasperated heart, came the evangel. The universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres, but god-like and my Father's!" But the true Shekinah is the human soul; the most hallowed scenes on earth are those which are bathed in the spiritual experiences of men of like passions with ourselves. All England is holy ground; but the Elstow village stirs in us, as no other part of our land can, thoughts of the Pilgrim's progress, his fierce conflicts, his glorious victories, his vast treasures, and his entrance into the land of Beulah. Milton's cottage at Chalfont St. Giles reminds us of the blind poet's calm communion with God, as well as of his soaring song. The dingy jail at Yarmouth is transfigured by the ministry of that saint of God, Sarah Martin, the needlewoman who gave her life to the care of the imprisoned. God mediates Himself to us through Nature, but chiefly through human nature! "The Word was made flesh," and men saw in the human Christ the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. So Elijah, thirsting for God, for the living God, goes to the Mount of

Moses to see and hear God; the God of the man who failed, but who was not cast aside because of his mistake, but enabled to take up again his dropped task, and carry it forward with newborn energy and to a purer success. Yes; dejected soul, hope in God, wait patiently upon Him, rise to the mount and stand before the Lord, and He will satisfy the desires of thine heart.

The first thing Elijah discovers on these heights of communion with God is the dismal and dismaying fact of his failure in his work at Carmel. The great, strong, and independent seer has displayed a most venturesome faith in God. In the greatness of his strength he has wrought mightily for Him, risked everything, dared everything, to prevent the destruction of the one true religion by its alliance with the paganism of the priests of Queen Jezebel. His faith in God knows no hesitation, no fears: he, the one and only prophet of God, utters his clanging challenge to the hundreds of the apostles of idolatry—one against the king and the queen, against the whole forces of the Court; one against the entire body of the wayward people—and he wins. The daring test he offered is successful. The fire descends upon the altar. God answers. The victory is his. The enemy is swept off the field; and the prophet, the prophet alone, is acclaimed the victor.

And then from the very pinnacle of his success he falls. He is swept along in the fury of his indignant impulses; he yields to his unillumined passion in his

exaggerated self-assertiveness, and, goaded by his unconscious pride, he dooms the whole of the priests to slaughter.

Scarce has he fallen than he sees his mistake. At once he collapses. He sees and says he is not a whit better than his fathers. He has repeated on a larger scale the blunder of Moses. He sees it. He is humiliated beyond bearing. He wishes to die!

No doubt he is physically exhausted. His nerves are all unstrung. The tumult of excitement through which he has passed has drained the sources of his bodily life. He needs food. But that is not all; that is not the worst. He is not merely exhausted, he is illuminated.

It is when we are laid low we see into the truth of things. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word." The naked fact finds us out, not when we march riotously along, trusting to our own great strength, burning with fiery zeal, but when the "howling of the senses" is hushed, and the spirit can catch even the whispers of the messengers of God. He sees that he is the author of his own misery. He has thought more of himself than of his cause, more of himself than of his God; his wail of despair betrays his exaggerated estimate of himself and of his position. "I, even I"—how it recurs, this obstinate and querulous egotism! He is obsessed by himself, though he never suspected it. We do not suspect it—that is the subtlety and the wizardry of evil; we are caught in the toils of our own pride, and

confuse our jealousy for our own fleeting fame or baseless dignity with our jealousy for God and His kingdom.

But the sight of failures must not appal us. Our failures are our best teachers. We learn lessons from them our successes never can impart. They make the heart ache, and drive us to thoughts of cowardly surrender. They haunt us like ghosts, and terrify us as though they were demons; but if we stand on the mount before God, we shall learn how to make them staves of the ladder by which we shall climb to heights impossible without them. The art of living is to know what to do with our defeats, and no one can aid us in the mastery of that art like the God of Moses and Elijah.

But it is not enough to know the *fact* of failure, we need also to discover the secret cause, the deepest reason for our mistakes, if we are to prepare ourselves for the avoidance of similar disasters.

Elijah's mistake is due to his partial and fragmentary conception of God and of His methods of work. He knows Him as the Lord God Almighty, armed with a glittering sword, swift to execute judgment upon His enemies, irresistible in His work, and invincible in warfare. That idea of God jumps with his habitual idea of himself—with his massive strength, with his lonely sovereignty over his own life, his singular aloofness from human sympathies and human sorrows. He welcomes it. He exults in it, and uses it as the test of the true religion. The God that answers by fire, He is

God, and beside Him there is none else. That is the sum and crown of the prophet's theology.

And it is true, but it is not all the truth. And therefore he is summoned to the mount before the Lord to complete his education. He is waiting there for the Teacher, all attention to the passing by of God. "And behold a great and strong wind rends the mountains and breaks in pieces the rocks before the Lord." But the Lord is not in the storm. No message comes from it to the distracted pupil. "After the wind there is an earthquake." It startles; it stirs! But it does not reveal God. No evangel is in it. "After the earthquake a fire." A fire? Why, God had answered by fire but yesterday! Surely the Lord is in the fire? No! The Lord was not in the fire. It settled the controversy with the priests, but there are things fire cannot do. It has no news for this seer. But "after the fire a still, small voice"—a sound of gentle stillness that made itself heard within the quieted spirit of the prophet, so that he wrapped his face in his mantle and listened, and heard the speech of God—of that God who is a consuming fire, but is also sweet patience and motherly gentleness, and "fulfils Himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world," and one true method of work should be adjudged of universal and exclusive application. He learns that God's kingdom comes without the sword and death, and by mercy and grace, peace and life; that He does not cry or strive or lift up His voice in the streets, but works within the

solemn stillness of the human spirit, cleansing it of its errors, and renewing it in righteousness and joy.

It is a great instruction, and it takes a long time to learn it, especially for men of Elijah's make, and for the people of the strenuous, self-sufficing, and haughty West. "Force is no remedy." The priests are killed, but Jezebel is still on the throne, as strong as ever and much more determined. Force has only aroused force. Compulsion begets compulsion. They that use the sword perish by the sword. Elijah can kill, but so can Jezebel, and she says she will, and will kill *him*. The storm-clouds do their work; earthquakes and fire have their mission in the progress of the universe, but mind is the master of the body, and the soul is superior to the flesh, and God is over all; and though He answers by fire, that is not the best answer He gives to the questions of the spirit of man: that best answer He supplies in the quiet of the inward life, by His gentle patience and forbearance, forgiving mercy and solacing love.

Alas that we have not yet done with compulsion in religion! Still men behave as though wild, passionate indignation, intemperate denunciation of evil, civic penalties for difference of religious conviction, would work out the purposes of God. It is Elijah's mistake. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual. Jesus is mighty in His meekness, conquering in His gentleness, draws all men to Him by the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross.

That way lies success. Thus the kingdom comes.

The Teacher's work does not finish with His parable. He listens to His querulous pupil as he describes his self-pity, and shows how his despair has made him blind to God, and to the invisible forces at work for Israel's final redemption—blind, indeed, to nearly everything but his opponents and himself; and then withdraws him from the menaces of Jezebel and the idolatries of the people, to gaze on the hidden reserves of Jehovah, the thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and who by their quiet persistence in the service of God are the holy remnant and the strong hope of Israel and of the world.

So God comforts His servant, nerves his arm and brain for his future work. Elijah says, "I only, only I am left." No! says God; lift up your eyes and look on the fields white already to harvest. There are seven thousand men who really count, who do not belong to the idolaters. You see the throne, but not the base on which it rests. You fight with Jezebel and her priests at the social summit, but you do not take account of the masses of the people who are still true; you see the splendour and the pomp of opposition, and forget the forces of conscience, justice, and righteousness.

The men on whom the progress of the world actually depends are not those whose clamant voices are heard above the crowd and whose life is one spectacular demonstration, but the faithful souls who say little but stand firm; who do not cry aloud in the streets, but refuse to change with changing circumstances; who do not shape their conduct according to the

exigencies of the moment, but are steadfast all the time. God still entrusts the real leadership of life not to those who make the noise, but to that small transfigured band the world cannot tame. Oh! I wish we could really believe in God—in the hidden work of His Spirit convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and judgment; then would our faith never fail us, and our hope always be bright and enduring.

To the strong consolation contained in that assurance God adds an exceeding great and precious promise concerning Elijah's future work. The evil he has fought will go under, it must perish; the good he has achieved will be conserved and increased. His failures are not fatal. His mistakes are not irreparable. The religion he has sought to serve will not perish. Nothing of value is suffered to perish out of the world. It is like Tennyson's "virtue, always going on and ever to be." The wrong is beaten down and beaten back. Wickedness cannot escape penalty. If it does not fall at the first blow, it will at the second; or if not at that, at the third. Should it dodge Hazael, King of Syria, it will be caught by Jehu, King of Israel; or if it wriggles out of the hands of both, then Elijah's successor will deal with it. Goodness is predestined to last. It is not wasted. It seems to be, but it is not. Life would be unendurable without this revelation. We could not see with calm the institutional changes that look like the destruction of beauty and goodness did we not know that these changes are only in form and not in substance. It is the gold of goodness that

lasts; it is the dross of evil that goes to the scrap-heap.

It will not only last, it will increase. Fresh values will come into life. Elisha is given to Elijah, a friend of the lonely man, a companion, a comrade, to humanise this son of the desert, to free him of his egotism and broaden his sympathies. The God who gave David his Jonathan, Peter his Andrew, Augustine his Alypius of Tagaste, Luther his Melancthon, Calvin his Beza, gave Elijah his anointed associate and successor, and so increased and perpetuated his usefulness. Religion is an active, increasing, and forward-looking force. "Man is made to grow, not stop." "Life moves to its great end; fulfilment, not frustration, is its goal." The race is not doomed to stagnation, but destined to advance. Elijah is not the last nor the only man. Away, then, with pride and self-sufficiency. Away with our disturbing and blinding egotisms. Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom others believed? Let us ascend to "the mount, and stand before the Lord." "O Zion, get thee up into the high mountains." Away from the lowlands of vanity and crudity, of selfish and partial thoughts of God. See Him in His fulness in Christ Jesus. Let us commune with Him about our work. Pray before work. Pray at work. Pray after work. Always pray; really pray. Let us do all our work as before our loving and redeeming and ever-renewing God, and be glad.

V

SAMSON, OR THE PERILS OF
MIDDLE AGE

“And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times, and shake myself. But he wist not that the Lord had departed from him.”—JUDG. xvi. 20.

IS it possible for us to lose hold of God and not know it? He is our God and our Guide—may we, as we go through the pilgrimage of this world, let go His hand and wander on over the broad moors of life altogether unaware that we are travelling without our Leader? His grace reaches us along many channels—may those conduits be choked up without our becoming conscious that we are no longer in connection with Him who is the source of our strength and the means of our spiritual progress? Is it possible we may be so mastered by our passions, or misled by our false ambitions, as to leave the still waters of peace and the nourishing pastures of revelation, and roam in the barren deserts without knowing that we have changed our place?

Certainly that is the meaning of Samson's record.

Most of us think of him as the Hercules of Israel, moving with prodigious power and startling impressiveness amongst scenes of danger and death, and crowned with surprising victories; he is really another Adam, clad with a greater strength than the first, and tempted by another Eve, but, like the first, falls in his Paradise and is driven out and sent wandering in darkness and misery far beyond its gates. He is cited as a conquering Goliath, slaying his thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass,—as Shamgar his six hundred with an ox-goad; for it is not the tool but the man that counts,—but in fact he is a giant who cripples his own energies, forges fetters for his own limbs, and dashes himself to ruins. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews places him amongst men of bold venture, heroic risk of consequence and of daring faith, who waxed valiant in fight and turned to flight the armies of aliens; and no doubt he deserves high rank amongst the great men of the commonwealth of Israel, but the tragedy of his career makes him a beacon-light on the heights of the hills of life, warning us of the danger of moral collapse, of yielding to the subtlety of evil; and bids those of us who are in the middle of life take special heed lest we continue to think we stand when we have already fallen.

“He wist not that he had lost God.” God was gone out of his consciousness, and he did not know it. It came to him as a paralysing surprise. He said, as the ghastly fact stared him in the face, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself.” He will force the

position by the vehement exertion of his will. He will call in his dissipated energies, and go forth in his old strong way. It is in vain; there is no response. His iron muscles are as tow—his whipcord nerves are as soft as flax. His strength is departed from him. He handles himself as in the times past, but nothing comes of it. He is powerless. His foes do as they please with him. They put out his eyes! They bind his ponderous limbs with fetters of brass, thrust him into a prison-house, and force him to grind at their machines! "For he wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

It is one of the most pathetic pictures of the Bible. Job sitting on the ash-heap and cursing the day of his birth has less of tragedy in it. Jeremiah bemoaning the lost condition of his beloved land, sad as is the sight, yet reaches the sublime of pathos; but great Samson, fighting himself, putting his defunct forces into line only to find himself utterly beaten and wholly ruined, is a sight to stir the pity of God and men.

I

What does it mean to lose God? It means that the sense of God has gone out of life. That is the awful, the indescribable fact. It is not the loss of his dedicated hair! That was but the outward and visible sign of the dedication of the man; and the close-cropped hair is now the witness to the departure of the *man* with the departure of God. For a man cannot

keep himself and lose his God. *The man goes*, and cannot be found any more. He is lost. Not only are the waving locks missing, but so is the man himself. Seemingly he is what he was. The physique is the same: huge, massive, commanding as before. Muscles and bones and nerves are as many, but the soul is gone out of him. He has lost his "faith" in God, in his being in league with Him, His servant and messenger; and therefore he has lost faith in himself, lost his grip on duty, lost his courage, his will. He is no longer a completely dedicated man. He is not Jehovah's choice. He knows he is the slave of Delilah, and his departed locks are the sign of his separation from God, and his consequent loss of himself.

For man is not fully man apart from God. It is the sense of God in the personal life that makes any man an effective man at all. Let him feel that he is in league with Jehovah, working out His work on earth, fighting under His leadership, warring against His foes, moving with and advancing the purpose of the Eternal, and he is invincible. He wins though he falls, for his battles are the battles of God, who never fails; and he rises to triumph, even though he dies. But let him lose that, and all is lost. The sense of his guilty departure from God haunts him, fills him with timidity, and makes him the prey of the first captors that come his way. He is no longer master of himself. For the girdle that binds up the man's powers into unity is the conviction that he is a God-called, God-sent, and God-accepted spirit, a man with a divine mission to his

fellows, with a truth he must utter, a work he must do, a cause he must make victorious, a goal he must reach. But that gone, that girdle cut, he is limp and helpless. Languor is in his heart, weakness is in his word, weariness is on his brow. He cannot help anybody.

Again, what does it mean to lose God? It means poor work, beginning to build and stopping midway, striking victories ending in ghastly failures, immeasurable opulence slipping into utter moral bankruptcy. All that the historian can say of Samson is that "*He began to deliver Israel.*" He finished nothing. He lost God, and could not complete His work. His was a poor, wasted life. Gideon, with not a tithe of his strength, did far better service. Joshua had little of his power and prowess, and yet wrought abiding good for his people. Samson left nothing behind him but the memories of his wasted energy and wild vengeance. "*He began to deliver Israel!*" He did not accomplish his task. The Philistines came back again in all their riotous strength, and renewed their wasting tyrannies over the people. The land mourned by reason of the oppressors, and though Samson had checked the advances of the enemies of his country for a while, yet his life was without any enduring advantage.

True, he recovered for one tragic moment the mastery of himself! "*His hair began to grow again.*" The old symbol of his dedication to God reappeared, and with it there returned some sense of his need of God, and a revival of his faith in Him; and on the great feast day, when the Philistines took him from

prison and set him to make sport for them, he felt most keenly his humiliation, and, full of indignation and remorse, he called upon the Lord, and said, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once"—but what for? Is it that he may, by a special struggle, obtain liberty for Israel? No! It is that he may be avenged of the Philistines for his blindness! And then, in a furious exertion of his tremendous power, he slew more at his death than he had done in his life. He threw away his own life in an act of avenging cruelty, and his judgeship came to an end in a fierce tragedy which made more manifest the failure of his whole career. He did not obey God nor follow Him, and so failed to master himself and the work to which he was called of God.

It is only as we retain a fresh and vivid consciousness of God and of our union with Him, as we realise that it is the Eternal Will that is working in us and that we are working with, that we can lift our tasks to the highest plane, persist in them till they are finished, and so make positive, if small, additions to the stock of the spiritual wealth of the world. In union with Him we cannot fail.

II

Can men lose God and not know it? Yes. The critical point in the interpretation of Samson's life is that he lost his consciousness without being aware of it. "He wist not that God had departed from him."

He thought all was well when, in fact, all was lost. Think of it! God—the great, the Eternal God; the God to whom he was devoted by his mother and father in his childhood; the God who had given him signal victories over the foes of Israel; the God who was his Judge and Leader—He had slipped out of his life without his noticing it, until the fearful consequences of that departure stared him in the face.

It is the way with the things of the spirit. They come and go without observation. Eve's fall is not when she seizes the forbidden fruit, but when she yields to the desire for it. Achan's sin starts in coveting the Babylonian treasure. So Samson's fall is within, though he discovers it only when his efforts to recover and reassert himself are all unavailing. The tares are in the field, but it is not till they spring up that the farmer knows what the enemy has been doing. The microbe works out of sight, and it is only when its ravages are felt and seen that the physician is called in. The Pharisees declare that they "see," and Jesus regards the declaration as proof sufficient that they are "blind," and do not know it.

Therefore, let him that thinks he is standing securely take heed! He may have fallen already—if not actually into the hands of the Philistines, yet from the steadfast faith in the living God, from full loyalty to his accepted ideals, from mastery of himself, and from all the noble purposes of the dedicated life.

III

At what period of his life did Samson fall? Not in his dawning youth! Then all was eagerness, intrepidity, buoyancy, daring, and unbroken victory; "his strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure." Nor yet in a ripened old age, with its weakened nerve, dimmed vision, and failing strength. Old age was not his portion. He is in the meridian of his years, in the fifth decade of his experience, and ought to have been at the maximum of his wisdom and self-mastery. The gains of a youth "clothed with the spirit" of a home consecrated to goodness and patriotism; of perils faced and conquered; of warnings repeated; of lessons learnt from failures and defects—are all laid at his feet. He ought to be at his best, but, alas! he is caught in the toils of Delilah, and carried away from God and from his true and nobler self.

Is Samson's fall in the fatal forties a rare event? By no means. History is full of similar beacons. In fact, middle life is the period of special peril. A little while ago I asked a gathering of ministers and others, "What is the time of the greatest peril to the spiritual life?" The answer was unanimous. Amongst those men of experience and of observation there was no hesitation in saying that it is not in *youth*, nor yet in *old age* that the fires of trial and temptation are at their hottest. No: it is in *middle life* that the early glow and passion for high ideals cool; that the hand forgets its cunning in good work, and tightens round

the purse; that the lips are locked in silence against wrong, and open in appeal for the gilded trifles of Society and the mockeries of the world's vain show; that the feet run in deep ruts of worldliness, and avoid the fresh but rugged path of harder service. Each man had visions of those he had known who had lost the elasticity and fervour of their Christian life; lost the fertile wonder of the world and the charm of the noble life; lost the care for the woes of the world and the daily tragedies of want and sorrow; lost the promises that gild the horizon with gold, and the justice and liberty and pity that are the saviours of humanity: each had visions of men of whom they were obliged to say, "Ye *did* run well; why do you now move so slowly towards the goal?"

In an article describing the brilliant gifts and prodigious activities of one of our young statesmen I find these words: "But has he staying power? Can anyone who has devoured life with such feverish haste retain his zest to the end of the feast? *How will forty find him?—that fatal forty*, when the youth of roselight and romance has faded into the common day and the horizon of life has shrunk incalculably, and when the flagging spirit no longer answers to the spur of *external* things, but must find its motive and energy from *within*, or find them not at all."

It is a searching question. Let us adapt it to and use it for ourselves, and add the prayer: "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

IV

Five counsels arise straight out of these facts.

1. *Watch with the utmost vigilance against the increasingly fatal power of unrestrained appetite and passion*—appetites and passions lawful in themselves, but entirely destructive of the spiritual life if permitted to obtain the mastery. By that sin fell Noah and Napoleon, Jacob and Judas, Samson and Saul, and myriads more. Only by rigid and regular self-discipline can we be safe. Paul will beat his body black and blue rather than be a castaway. The lamp of watchfulness must always be lit, and the loins tightly girt, if we are to run with safety and swiftness the race that is set before us. Lust, ambition, the desire to make a show, foolish greed of fitful fame, the deceitfulness of riches, the cares of this world—these choke the word of God's revelation and make it unfruitful. Bunyan, with his fine skill, paints the doom of the man of unbridled desire when he takes Christian to the Interpreter's house and shows him the Man in the Iron Cage. The room is very dark, and Christian, distressed and anxious, says to the man in the cage—

“What art thou?”

The man answered: “I am not what I was once.”

“What wast thou once?”

The man said: “I was once a fair and flourishing professor, both in my own eyes and also in the eyes of others. And now I am a man in despair, and am

shut up in it as in this iron cage. I cannot get out of it—oh no, I cannot.”

“And how camest thou into this condition?”

“I left off to watch and be sober. *I laid the reins on the neck of my lusts.* I sinned against the light of the world.”

“For what did you bring yourself into this condition?”

“For the lusts, the pleasures, and the profits of this world, in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight, and now every one of these things also bites and gnaws me like a living worm.”

“Well,” said Christian, “this is fearful. God help me to watch and be sober, and to pray that I may shun the cause of this man’s misery.”

2. *Never forget the danger of occasions of moral and spiritual fatigue.* Sir James Paget told his students that most of our bodily diseases start in sheer fatigue. The late King of Portugal wrote in one of his last letters about his “fatiguing” fight against corruption, and said “he really felt himself *morally* and physically tired.” The Galatians grew weary in well-doing. Jesus apologised for His disciples, saying of their failure to keep watch, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The incessant battling with our besetting sins of temper, the strain in “*keeping* the heights the soul is competent to gain,” is often very fatiguing. We grow tired; and we need to “get away into a desert place,” and secure rest for body and mind, to reinforce our strength by communion with

the Master and with Nature, with ourselves and with our God.

3. *Do not suffer yourselves to harden* under the influence of the inevitable disillusionment that comes with the advancing years! Watch against the dimming of your vision to the eternal verities by the passing over your sky of the passing clouds of doubt and change!

Suffer not your altered view of religion and of life, of success and failure, of the massed evils of the world, and of the struggling and often defeated good, to make you less sensitive to the needs of souls, or less sure of the victorious sainthood of the world.

4. *Do not neglect personal prayer*, or the stimulus and inspiration of public worship. Beware of the temptation to rest content with *one* visit a week to the assemblies where your brothers worship God! There is peril in yielding; and the temptation is strong. "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air." We breathe without effort so long as we really live; and we pray without strain or struggle or break so long as the life of God beats within the soul. Maintain the soul's life by unbroken communion with God. "Practise"—yes, practise—the presence of God; *i.e.* make it your business to share your life with God, to see Him in all things, to live your life with Him and for Him and in Him, as in your "atmosphere," and you will not be found sighing—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?"

You will go from strength to strength, following on to know more and more of the Lord, and to rejoice with increasing gladness in His ever-enlarging salvation.

5. *Cherish the belief and hope that "the best is yet to be."* The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The righteous should bring forth the *best* fruit in their old age. They should be less anxious about the morrow, and more sure of the mercy and truth that endure for ever; less fault-finding, and more patient and kindly; less and less the sport of the things temporal, and more and more master of the things spiritual and eternal.

But I must not forget that I am also talking to some people still young, who, like Samson, were dedicated to God on the day of their birth by fathers and mothers of fine heroic mould, of Puritan temper, rich in the wealth of self-sacrifice, intense in hatred of all evils, and full of devotion to the highest and broadest good. It is a splendid heritage—have you honoured it? It is an inspiring tradition—what have you done with it? Recall those sacred parents that transfigured your home and made it full of beauty and charm. Will you not honour them? Will you not be clothed with the Spirit of God as in an incandescent flame, and go through life burning up the evils of the world and guiding others in the one true path? Surely you will not quench the Spirit that now is burning within you—the Spirit of purity and wisdom and peace! And what I say to you I say to all: Do not quench the Spirit.

VI

A FARMER'S SONG

“Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,
And look well to thy herds:
For riches are not for ever;
And doth the crown endure unto all generations?
The hay is carried, and the tender grass showeth itself,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.
The lambs are for thy clothing,
And the goats are the price of the field:
And there will be goats' milk enough for thy food,
For the food of thy household;
And maintenance for thy maidens.”—PROV. xxvii. 23-27.

THE Revised Version of this section of the Book of Proverbs is so printed as to suggest that these eleven lines form a brief but complete song. There is a slight and intentional break in the continuity of the verses in this part of the chapter. The eleven lines make five verses; but they stand apart like a statue, detached from all that goes before and from all that succeeds and surrounds. They have the wholeness and independence of a finished product, as though they formed a single hymn in one of our usual collections of song, and could be identified by a specific number and a special heading.

A slight examination of the text shows that as the life of a tree or of a child determines the shape of the oak or of the boy, so the poetical completeness and literary finish of this Scripture is due to the life breathed into it by its author. It is a creation, and has the individuality of its creator impressed on it. It is like a sonnet, for it has one idea, and beats with one emotion. It is a picture, and one formative purpose appears over the whole canvas. The scenery is rural, vivid, and interesting; the grouping of the successive figures is orderly and firm—orderly with the logical sequence of life, and firm with the coherence and sharpness of outline due to the mastery of soul over body.

It is a psalm, though found in the Book of Proverbs; and, although it does not match the peerless Shepherd Song in sylvan loveliness, pure calm, and soaring hopes, yet it is like it in its keynote of trust in God, its love of nature and life, and its rural beauty.

We are not so familiar with this farmer's song as with other odes in this book. Cooped up in great cities, stirred and absorbed by the excitement of an industrial era, we have neither time nor desire for the homely music of this rural harper. The strong feeling, dramatic picturing, and passionate appeals of the pathetic poem on drunkenness have struck responsive chords in every reader's heart.¹ Few of us forget the ruined field of the sluggard, with its nettles and weeds, gaping walls and broken gates, and the companion

¹ Prov. xxiii. 29-35.

picture of the lazy sleeper turning over and over in his sloth till he is aroused by the attack of want as a weaponed warrior breaking into his bedroom to punish him for his idleness.¹ But we have given scant attention to the rustic singer who tells us of the farmer's risks, notes the succession of the farmer's crops, sets open the door and shows us his well-ordered household, and seeks both to quicken industry and to inspire faith in the farmer's God. True, the song springs clear and clean out of the natural soil of the farmer's life, but it travels to the very steps of the throne of the Eternal Father. It is indeed a simple pastoral, and might be regarded as the farmer's *vade mecum*; but surely it is also a gospel, a gladdening message for him as he drives the plough over the field or counts his sheep on the hills; and, like all God's gospels, it has a warning word to drive out the lassitude that comes of bad seasons, and the despair that sets in after misfortune. Commonplace as the theme doubtless is, yet the Hebrew poet sings in order that with us "the melodies may abide of the everlasting clime," and we, carrying his "music in our hearts," may "ply our daily tasks with busier feet," because our "secret souls this holy strain repeat."

It can hardly be doubted that this is the song of a man of the soil, a son of labour, who describes the farmer's life not from the serene heights of observation, but from the realities of personal experience. He is the child of a pastoral people; a member of a com-

¹ Prov. xxiv. 30-34. Cf. also Prov. xxx. 7-9, xxxi. 2-9, 10-31.

munity that found the "ox" and the "ass" mentioned twice in the great "Ten Words," and again and again in the subsidiary regulations for their social life, and to whom farming was so central an interest that they held and taught that "the profit of the earth is for all," and even "the king is served by the field." He was a Hebrew yeoman, industrious and reflective, wise and godly, with a quick eye for the beauty of ever-varying nature, and a strong love for the simple economies and deep content of the farmer's life. He was a poet. The words he selects are pictures, vivid metaphors. The state of the flocks is to be seen in their "faces": in the "look" of the eye, the poise of the head, the firmness or weakness of step. He notes the succession of the months; the carting of the hay, followed by the fresh green new crop; the lambs slowly manufacturing garments for winter wear; the goats giving milk for the daily subsistence of the house.

It is in that last touch the interest of the singer centres. The human is supreme. The home gives to the fields their meaning, to the cattle their service, and to the farm its beauty. He is no dreamer lost to life in admiration of the "common countenance of earth and sky," but a brother-man with soul enough to see the poetry of ordinary human lives—lives far more akin to drudgery than to romance. To him, the man at the plough and the maidens milking the goats are children of God, with hopes and fears, with love and sorrow, living on the farm and by it, and getting through it their education and discipline, their wealth

of happiness and character; and therefore his poem does not recall the skilful handling and elaborate treatment of Virgil's *Georgics*, but the sympathy, humanity, and faith of the Ayrshire ploughman. He is the Robert Burns of the Hebrew singers, who

"In his glory and his joy,
Followed the plough along the mountain-side,"

and sang to his comrades of his labour with the desire to lighten their burdens and perfect their trust, assured that

"To mak' a happy fireside clime
To weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
O' human life."

The pastoral is an instruction; therefore it begins by telling the farmer to "be diligent to know the state" or condition, the general "look," of his "flocks." Poetry is practical. "Every great poet is a teacher, or he is nothing," said Wordsworth. The poet's business is with life: the making of men's feelings more sane, pure, and permanent; the gift of new and wider horizons of thought and higher moods of emotion, the stimulus of will and the increase of achievement.

Still, the exhortation, though energetic, is pensive. It is in a minor key. Life is full of change. Seasons vary. Times are bad. Fortune is fickle. Prosperity is a winged bird, and, be it never so beautiful and the cage in which you have locked it never so secure, it may fly away. Acres covered with corn call aloud for the reaper, but the only response is the ceaseless,

drenching rain. The farmer sighs for sunshine, and he gets for answer

“The death-dumb Autumn’s dripping gloom.”

Even the “diadem,” the token that separates the king from his people, does not continue from generation to generation. The brightest honours fade. The fine gold dims. Wealth decays. With the one touch of passion that makes the poem, the one outleap of the flame of feeling, he says, “*And surely* the crown of the king,” the most distinguishing possession, does not last. “Make hay,” therefore, “while the sun shines.” Give heed to “littles.” Consider well thy “small cattle,” the sheep and goats. It is in the little economies the battle is lost or won. It is the alertness that takes time by the forelock that gains the prize. Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves. Seize and use the present moment. Very homely counsels indeed are these, and read like quotations from Poor Richard; but then the happiness of life depends upon the steady practice of the everyday virtues of carefulness, industry, and promptitude. Three-fourths of our life are on this low level, and the way we behave thereon settles at once our present happiness, and the quality and worth of the remaining fourth. “He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.”

He will be likely to acquire two other qualifications on which the farmer’s well-being depends—“the open eye” and the dedicated will. According to the Hebrew

poet, the successful husbandman must give heed to know the "look" of his cattle, and "put his heart into his work for his herds." He is a doctor, and must go about his fields swift to note the changes in the condition of his sheep and goats as soon as they occur, and supply that physicianly aid which will ward off disease and keep them in full health. "A horse requires more care than a child," said a coachman to me; and certainly the farmer who has not what Carlyle calls an "open eye" will not be likely to have a productive farm.

Do not despise your work. Do it well. Be a whole man to it whilst you are at it. Israel's great men did not think it beneath them to inspect their flocks. The patriarchs were shepherds and cultivators of the soil. Job was a shepherd. Moses was a shepherd. David looked well after his flocks.¹ Gideon was accosted by God when he was thrashing wheat. A great and noble life does not depend on rank or place, but on purpose, faith, love, character, and service.

But it is in the latter part of the song we find the good news. If the *first* verse enjoins carefulness, wisdom, alacrity, and devotion, and the *second* enforces the practice of these virtues on the ground of the uncertainties of the farmer's life, then the three verses following *console* him with the assurance of the bounty of God and the indefeasible and incomputable compensations of Nature and Providence. This "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people," begins with a rural harvest

¹ 1 Chron. xxvii. 29-31.

scene, where, after the plentiful ingathering of the hay, one sees the new grass starting forth and covering the meadows again. For the earth is not dead after its first yield: the second crop appears; and, when the fodder of the mountain slopes has been gathered in, and the barns are filled with plenty, the husbandman still has his lambs with their warm wool for clothing, and the goats, some of which may be sold for the rent of the field, whilst the rest supply the milk needed for the maintenance of the house.

So the life of agricultural industry has better guarantees than the crowns of kings. Husbandry is more secure than the treasures of the great. Nature is exhaustlessly reproductive. Let men have free access to and free use of it, and its cultivation will be a sure source of support for the family and a source of progress for the nation. "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread." Mother Earth cares for her children. The landscape of the farm is full of Divine feeling, and rich in suggestions that inspire calm and quicken industry. It throbs with the tender heart of God. It is alive. In its simple and steady processes it reveals the Father's care for His child, and invites him to steady and healthful toil in obedience to its laws, and to calm-bringing trust in Him in response to His love.

"The dim green-mantled earth
Warm cherished every floweret's birth."

"The grass growing on the mountains," "the year crowned with goodness," are guides to "the *paths*

of God”—the paths that “drop fatness,” that drop “upon the pastures of the wilderness,” and make “the little hills rejoice on every side.”

So the spirit breathed throughout this song is that of trust in the great loving and superintending Farmer, the Husbandman-in-chief, who never forgets His children, and to whom our common lives, with their daily toils and sorrows, their faith and hope, are unspeakably dear. It links our humble working life with the will and the work of the Eternal, and assures us of the care of the Highest for the shepherd on the hill, and the ploughman in the field, and the milkmaid at the stall. It anticipates, dimly it must be confessed, but really, the assurance given us by Jesus that our Heavenly Father knows what things we have need of before we ask Him; and that we may leave to Him the care of our lives if only we will care first for His kingdom and His righteousness. Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe in nature, and do your duty; and the farm life, with its regular round of duties, its simple loves, its high thoughts, its wise economies, its immediate touch of earth, its charming gossip, its pleasant human interests, and its many windows through which we may catch sight of the face of God, will yield us all we need for a simple, manly, godly life.

The farmer is credited with an exceptional gift for grumbling. That verdict lacks proof. Some of the most serene and trustful souls I have known have grown up in goodness and service by the aid of

agricultural industry. Ruskin says that, "Supposing all circumstances otherwise the same with respect to two individuals, the one who loves nature most will always be found to have more faith in God than the other." The husbandman is close to the heart of nature, lives in touch with God, and so, more than many, shares His deep content, His tranquillity, and builds up a character of hardy independence, of kindly considerateness for his servants, and of helpful ministry to the poor. May our study of this song make our spirits more trustful, our characters more strong, and our lives more sunny!

VII

THE UNVEILING OF LIFE

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; for He will shew them His covenant."—Ps. xxvi. 14.

"God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit."—1 Cor. ii. 10.

"HE will show them His covenant." That is an exceeding great and precious promise. For it is not easy for us to find God and to be sure of Him; much less to understand His ways, discover the laws of His action and the issues of His work. But, according to this gladdening word, we may expect to find out the "secret" of His dealings with us, to get hold of the key which will interpret His rule of our individual lives, and discover the goal towards which the whole creation moves.

Men are frequently assuring us that their primary difficulty is to know God. Eye hath not seen Him, nor ear heard. Man, by all his searching, has not found out the Almighty. The vast extension given to the powers of the senses by the telescope and microscope has not solved the enigma. Men recognise force, energy, continuous, exhaustless; but personality is veiled. Like wanderers in the catacombs, whose

guiding light has gone out, and who have lost their hold of the thread that will lead them again to the clear radiance of the sunshine, so they wander amongst the phenomena of life, only to tell us that God Himself remains the secret of secrets, and confirm the saying of Jesus that "No human eye has ever seen God."

Others cannot resist the conviction that behind and at the heart of all things God is; but they allege that life is so full of contradiction and collision, of fierce cruelty and boundless benefits, of awful catastrophe and captivating beauty, that they can make nothing of it. The quarrel between good and evil is interminable, and the evil is so abundant and gigantic as to be terrifying. Morley says that John Stuart Mill wrote his fiercest pages concerning the maleficence of Nature, and asserted that "the course of Nature is replete with everything that when committed by human beings is most worthy of abhorrence, so that if one should endeavour to imitate natural law, he would be universally seen and acknowledged to be the wickedest of men." Even a little sick child, hearing the phrase, "a world of goodness," said: "It does not seem to be a world of goodness when we see drunken men fighting in one street, and hear husband and wife quarrelling in another."

In the *Life of Walter Pater* I read this passage about his boyhood: "The sorrow and suffering of the world came home in dim glimpses to the child as a thing which was inextricably intertwined with the life of men and animals alike. There was, as yet, no attempt

to harmonise the two dominant strains of feeling; they were the two great facts for him—beauty and sorrow: they seemed so distinct from, so averse to, each other; sorrow laying her pale hand so firmly on life, withering it at its very source, and striking from it what was lovely and delectable. And yet he noted the pathetic attempt of beauty to reassert itself, as in the violets which grew on the child's grave and drew their sweetness from sad mortality. And there came, too, the terror of death, the sad incidents of which imprint themselves with so sinister a horror on the tender mind. At any time or place, in a moment, the faint atmosphere of the chamber of death would be breathed around him, and the image with the bound chin, the quaint smile, the straight, stiff feet, shed itself across the air, upon the bright carpet, amid the gayest company, or happiest communing with himself."

Confessedly, it is not easy to find out the secret of God. The worlds of nature and of man are not so plainly intelligible that he who runs may read their meaning. Let us admit it is far otherwise, and welcome the good news that the "secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and that "He will shew them His covenant."

For this is a great promise greatly fulfilled. The singer's figure is historic. The word "covenant" is Israel's gospel. It was the rainbow on the heavens of their life. It was the rock on which their commonwealth was built. It was the food of grace by which noble souls were nourished into greatness and strength.

It was the inspiration of legislators and judges like Moses and Gideon, and of seers like Elijah and Hosea. It told them that they were the elect people; that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was their God; that He had bound Himself, as a master to a servant, as a husband to a wife, to take care of them, to watch over them in their wanderings, to guide them through their difficulties, to be their shepherd, their physician, their redeeming Lord. It was this "covenant" that fed their patience, heartened them after every defeat, and gave them new hope in their despair. It was the working idea of Hebrew life. What the Magna Charta is in the political history and development of England, that, and infinitely more, was the Covenant in the life of the people of God.

Therefore, to find out its meaning was their meat and drink, to know what it signified was their strength and joy; so that no promise had a wider compass or a sweeter music than the gladdening strain, "He will show them His covenant." It was what the words "God is love" are to us. It told them that He would unveil to them the terms under which He entered into special relations with them as His people, the laws according to which He governed them, the conditions they had to keep on their part and the pledges he would honour on His. They would know that to be "the Covenant People" meant that God had, indeed, chosen them to be His own for ever. More exhilarating message they could not hear than the words, "He will shew them His covenant."

But, whilst it is a great historic word, it contains within it and as its base an eternal and universal fact. God's revelation of Himself to Israel is an exposition of the truths which underlie the whole of our human life. What He did with and for that people is a prolonged instruction as to what He is doing for all men, by what processes He enters into definite relations with them, under what terms we dwell with Him in uplifting fellowship, and by what paths He conducts us to the surest happiness, so that the promise is to us and to our children. "He will shew us His covenant." He will reveal to us the things of nature and of grace by His Spirit.

I have reminded you of the difficulties man had felt in the interpretation of nature. For ages it has been judged to be chaotic, confused, unintelligible, and by no means a beneficently ordered process. But in these last days God has revealed vast breadths of meaning in the world around us by the prophets and interpreters He has sent us. We do not yet know all—there are mysteries we cannot explain—but we know much. Secrets have been laid bare. Laws have been discovered. Passage after passage in the vast book of the universe has been explained, and the conviction grows that it is a reasoned world we live in; and when it is fully unveiled we shall say of every part of it, as we do of one, "The heavens declare the glory of God."

The physical universe is as full of His purpose as it is of His working, and men like Newton and

Faraday, Röntgen and Lister, Galvani and Marconi, have interpreted to us the facts, and enabled us to see their laws: that is, God has revealed His secrets to those prophets of nature who have, like the hermit in Benson's "Angel of Pain," endeavoured to make themselves one with nature by sympathy, reverence, and obedience; and so they have come to understand our world, unveil our lower life, and show that it means good for us and not ill, and that its whole purpose and drift is the education and discipline of man for the worthiest life.

Rise into the higher realm of art, of painting and sculpture, of music and literature, and note how the secrets of these vast worlds have been unveiled. Recall the familiar names of Dante in Italy, Goethe in Germany, Shakespeare and Milton in England, as the leaders in the great succession of the apostles of literature! To what heights of thought they carry us! What gladdening and uplifting visions they afford! Are you surprised that when Handel was asked how he came to compose that immortal oratorio the *Messiah*, he should have replied, "I thought I heard the angels singing it"? Yes. God hath revealed His worlds of song to us, by men who have been lifted into "the heavenlies" and filled with conceptions born of the raptures of that realm. Ordinarily we attribute these magnificent effects to "genius," but is it not more accurate to say that God, who is in the heart and the intellect, showing His covenant with nature—that it is ordered in all things and sure,

and not left to chaos and ruin—is also in the realms of song and literature, showing that they too are under laws which may be understood by reverent and sympathetic souls, and their treasures communicated for the service of man?

And surely, dear friends, if the Eternal speaks to us of the things which concern the imagination and the reason, He will not be dumb to the appeals of the heart and the conscience, the aspiration and the spirit. If He discloses to those who fear Him and reverence His works what those works mean, He will show us what are His definite relations with our souls, and what is His attitude towards our sins and our cares, our daily discipline and our future destiny. If He unveils nature and thought by His Spirit, He will not less, but more readily, reveal man in his innermost being to himself; and also the Eternal God, without whom he cannot become completely man. If He gives us a Bacon and a Faraday and a Wordsworth, will He not much more give us also an Isaiah and a Paul and a John? Yea, will He not also give us His Son?

Indeed, it is an indisputable fact that He has done so. He has shown us His covenant. We are as sure of His love and care of us as we are of the law of gravitation; we feel that we are not “cunning casts of clay,” but partakers of the Divine nature; not “magnetic mockeries,” but spiritual realities; and that His personal love of us is the one solace of the heart, the one supreme joy of life. It is this lights up

the dark and cloudy day, brings solace in sorrow and victory over despair. It is this marks out the path of duty, creating an invincible conviction that a specific work has to be done, or hazard to be made, or burden to be borne. Men see the "secret" of their own life and hear His call to service as distinctly as Peter and John heard the call of Christ, and respond with the same whole-hearted promptitude and consecration.

Nay, more, they have discovered that the invincible God controls all the happenings of life, and compels them to co-operate for their good, and that therefore nothing can hurt them. "No weapon formed against them can prosper." Thus they have entered into peace, and have said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? All is well. Why fret about the morrow? Live well and nobly to-day. God is the God of the future. Trust in Him and fear not. Life is lovingly ordered. God is in it and over it. Fret not; fretting is waste. Worry not; worry is dissipation of the limited stock of energy. In Him is peace. They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed for ever." The revealed secret of the gracious rule of God is their everlasting peace.

And as with individuals, so with the whole of the human race. For God is the God of all the families of the earth, and the covenant which He has made with the individual is a covenant which embraces all mankind. Yea; it is because it is made with the whole creation that it embraces the individual. The

defeats, the evils to which a single race is subjected at successive intervals in its career, all take their place in the universal progress. The means by which a people are pushed back, and the suffering consequent upon the retardation for a brief while of some of the sections of the whole human family, become instruments by which those in the far distances are at length brought into line; so that, instead of one race going on alone to perfection, the other races come up, and they march together to the goal as one great family of God.

That is the revealed contract, so to speak, of God with the human race. It is a pledge of redemption and renewal, of ever-available help and of limitless progress, and it creates the faith and patience and strength of the saints. For patience is not passive, it is active; it is concentrated strength, so that a man holds to his position against attack, and will not suffer himself to be driven away from it. The prophets and leaders of mankind have been stored with that patience, when the wrecks of their plans have been around them and they have been almost overwhelmed by defeat, for they have felt assured that "the counsel of the Lord stands fast, and His purpose from generation to generation."

But how do we enter into this "secret" of the revelation of God? Not by the exercise of our lower faculties; for though God stands over against all our faculties, lower and higher, yet it is not by the senses that we come upon His choicest revelations. Paul

says, "We speak of things which eye has not seen nor ear heard, and which have never entered the heart of man; all that God has in readiness for them that love Him. For us, however, God has drawn aside the veil through the teaching of the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, including the depths of the Divine nature." The eye sees the daisies decking the field with beauty, the brilliant red of the rose, the variegated colours of the spring blossoms, the splendour and pomp of the midnight sky, and the innumerable wonders of nature; but that is all. The deep things of nature, as Lord Bacon taught, are unveiled only to the mind that is sympathetic with and reverent and obedient to nature, or that is receptive of the ministry of the unveiling ministry of the Spirit of God. Obedience is the organ of knowledge everywhere. If a man wills to do the will of the Father, he carries with him the test of the teaching, whether it is of God or no. And love of God and of man is the inspiration to obedience. The veil is always drawn aside to the loving and obedient soul. "If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching," said Jesus; "and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him"; and in that domestic atmosphere the clouds of error and doubt will disappear, and the light of life and of eternity fill the dwelling.

For revelation is seen at its fulness in Jesus Christ. He is the unveiling of life. He lays its deepest secrets bare. He tells all we are able to hear now; and His

Spirit waits to tell more as our power to receive grows. He is the Interpreter of the covenant of God with the whole race of man. In Him we see the redeeming purpose that penetrates and sways the life of the individual, of the human race, and of the whole creation of God. It is He who discloses the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world. We have the Divine purpose written out in a life. The whole course of Providence is set out in a single career. Jesus is the philosophy of history, the gospel of revelation in its completeness. Let us enter, then, into the school of Christ, and He will by the teaching of His Spirit take the veil from our eyes, and enable us by the Spirit to see life as it really is, and to use all its contents for our comfort and growth, and for the service of God and man.

VIII

THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION

"Those, however, who were scattered abroad went from place to place spreading the good news of God's message; while Philip went down to Samaria, and proclaimed Christ there. . . . And there was great joy in that city."—Acts viii. 4-8.

THAT is a description of one of many facts in the history of a revival of religion which is traced out in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles of the New Testament.

The revival came to the Hebrew Church—and not before it was needed. That Church, once brimful of vitality and throbbing with passion, reality, sincerity, spirituality, and energy, had lost its adventurous faith, its martyr zeal, its high ideals, and its grip of the invisible. Prophets had given place to pedants, confessors to actors, and invincible heroes to peddling dogmatists. The primal fires had cooled. The impact of the eternal realities was spent. The momentum of Israel's last great revival, that of the Maccabees, had exhausted itself. There was no soul, no vision. Courage had withered under the pressure of self-pity, and hope had been destroyed by the poison of cowardice.

The Church was a richly decorated form, not a life-redeeming force; a costly piece of embroidery, ornamenting a corpse: no longer a refuge for the troubled, or a home for the lonely, or a temple for God. It still babbled in mellifluous sentences about the fathers—dying churches always do—and then shuffled off, not without long prayers, into the pleasant fields of compromise. It gloried in the saintly souls who wielded the “hammer of God” against the foes of religion, and even built for them costly monuments, but then slunk away, blind and paralytic, to submit to the subtler foes who had succeeded them. It battled for the details of dogma as though they were life, but had no room for inflexible justice, rigorous fair play, and Divine charity. It substituted diplomacy for devotion, proselytism for piety, mechanism for life, and vanity for virtue. It had a name to live, but it was dead.

Jesus came. His ministry was one short year, perhaps two, at most three. He came to His own, but His own received Him not. He was cast out. The Hebrew Church spurned its greatest Son, persecuted Him as a disturber, arraigned Him as a criminal, condemned Him and put Him to death, even the death of the cross. That is what a moribund Church does with its truest revivalists. It crucifies them.

But the revival came. Nay, *thus* and *thereby* the revival came. Within a few weeks of the death of Jesus there burst forth a vast revolution. Religion straightway became a new and mightier force in the life of man, ascended to loftier planes of thought and

richer sources of emotion, wielded a mightier sceptre and advanced to a wider mission. A whole generation was wondrously exalted, enkindled, roused, inspired, filled and fired with the Holy Ghost. Religion forthwith counted for more in the life and movement of the world than it had ever done before. It was fed at the roots, and grew like the cedars of Lebanon. It was born again from above, and descended on the earth leading captivity captive, and forcing the rebellious to submit themselves to God. It was deepened and broadened, enlarged and carried to completeness at a bound. No revival equals this. Incontrovertibly it is the greatest movement in the history of man, and marks the greatest moment in the history of religion.

A new Church was born! That was inevitable. It was resisted, thwarted, but it came. All the sacred powers of tradition and convention were arrayed against it in vain. A real revival of religion must either restore the old Church in which it occurs or else go outside and create a new Church. It must have space, ample room for the energies of God. The life must express itself, just as the hidden forces of the spring give birth to fresh foliage and nourishing fruit. The music of the gospel cannot be chanted to the monotonies of the Pharisees. The David of the new day cannot contend against the Goliaths of impurity and wrong in the heavy armour of King Saul. Christianity can never reach its goal of universality whilst clad in the fettering robes of the Judaic faith. Freedom is the prime necessity for the

life of the soul. Better deny air to the lungs than freedom to the soul.

Not only a new Church, but a new literature came out of that revival; and a fresher and larger interpretation was given to the old. The new spirit created a literature of its own. That New Testament is the chief marvel of the literary world; so unique, so charged with life, freshness, and formative force that all that man has produced from that day to this contains nothing that surpasses it, nothing that equals it, or even comes near it, in the wealth of its revelation, in the grandeur and loftiness of its conceptions, in the reproductive energy of its facts, and in the simple strength and beauty of its style.

Surely, then, whoever wants to understand the revival of religion in the Churches should sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him. That is our first duty. Here is

“Work enough, to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tools’ true play.”

He is the pattern Revivalist. We are safe if we go to school to Him, drill ourselves in His methods, absorb His ideas, breathe His spirit, say what He said, do as He bids us, suffer as He suffered, and live and die as He did. He knows the way we should take: let Him lead! He has the word we should utter, and waits to tell us what it is. His are the plans, based on principles of permanent value, we

should frame and His is the loving, life-giving spirit that must sway all we say and do. Oh, Divinest Master! Saviour of the world! We wait on Thee! We wish to work in Thy way! Equip us, lead us, work in and through us for the reviving of the religion of our land!

I

On the face of the Record it appears that Jesus began with God, as the God of Righteousness, preached an ethical as against the prevalent formal and ceremonial conception of God, and therefore bade men "repent," change over from the current ways of conceiving God to His way.

His appeal was straight to the individual conscience and away from the Hebrew Church with its learned scholars and its performing priests. Indeed, He indicted the popular Church, exposed its leading people, condemned its hollowness and hypocrisy, its hardness of heart and disbelief of the living God, and assured them that what God demands is obedience, not rites; justice, not ceremonies; mercy and tenderness, not punctilious attendance on the externals of public worship. There is no religion without morality. Moral perfection is the ideal of religion.

Jesus said and reiterated the saying, "The tree is known by its fruits." "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." Two men built houses: one on the shifting sands of theological

opinion; and when the winds of adversity blew about the house, it fell. The other built on the rock of obedience to the will of God; and though the storm raged against it, it was secure as the rock on which it rested. The highest relationships—those to God and Christ—hinge not on ritual or dogmatic affinities, but on spiritual. “For who,” asks Jesus, “is my mother and my brother and my sister? Who, but those who do the will of My Father who is in heaven.”

So Christ cleared the air, lifted the obscurity from religion, brought the people back to the true standard, created a revolt of conscience and a revival of religion. In the teaching of Christ even faith is ethical—*i.e.* it is not a mere assent to any plan of life, but living; not an acquiescence in any set of ideas, however beautiful and true, but the incarnation of those ideas in behaviour; not merely affirming a creed concerning God, but confidence in, and submission to, and union and communion with God in Christ Jesus Himself, and, consequent upon that trust, a whole-souled effort to obey His laws. I hear somebody say, “The next revival will be ethical.” All revivals of religion are ethical. They must be. They come from God, and in man there is nothing nearer to God than his conscience, and therefore a fresh and fuller life for a man has always been and must always be ethical.

The Reformation was a protest of the conscience against the falsehoods, blasphemies, greed, and lies of the dominant Church. The evangelical revival of Wesley made the thief honest, the brutal gentle, the

miser generous, the selfish self-sacrificing, the bad good. Jonathan Edwards did not discuss ethical precepts or reason about their validity. He was a Puritan, and "took them for granted, as if at least so much must be required in order to the attainment of a higher ideal."¹ He placed the utmost emphasis upon the common duties of life in the covenant which the people of Northampton subscribed. In it "the people present themselves before the Lord, to renounce their evil ways and to put away their abominations from before His eyes. They solemnly promise and vow before the Lord, in all their concerns with their neighbours, to have a strict regard to the rules of honesty, justice, and uprightness; not to overreach or defraud him in any matter, or, either wilfully or through want of care, to injure him in any of his honest possessions or rights; and to have a tender respect, not only to their own interest, but to his; and particularly never to give him cause of offence by wilfully or negligently forbearing to pay their just debts; wherever they may be conscious of having in the past wronged their neighbour in his outward estate, never to rest till they have made that restitution which the rules of moral equity require. They promise to avoid all backbiting, evil-speaking, and slandering, as also everything that feeds a spirit of bitterness or ill-will or secret grudge; not to ridicule a neighbour's failings, or needlessly insist on his faults; to do nothing in a spirit of revenge. And further, they will not allow their private interest or honour, or

¹ *Jonathan Edwards*, by A. V. G. Allen, D.D., pp. 156, 157.

the desire for victory against a contrary party, to lead them into any course of which their conscience would reproach them as hurtful to religion or to the interests of Christ's kingdom; and particularly, in public affairs, not to allow the interests of party or the desire of worldly ambition to lead them counter to the interest of true religion."

That is the revival, we are told by friends and foes alike, our British Churches need at this hour; and we cannot doubt it. It is for want of it there is such a widespread alienation from and revolt against them. They tell us our ethical ideals are low, selfish, materialistic, worldly, and idolatrous. We do not believe in the things seen and eternal. We are the slaves of the obsolete, gabblers of creeds no longer held, cowardly where we ought to be courageous, greedy of wealth and fame and vain show, lovers of luxury and foes of simplicity, trafficking even in the temples of God for gain, upholders of vested interests and dead conventions, followers of Mars and not of the Prince of Peace, content to live on the low, selfish level of the world around us. Alas! alas! it is too true! Let us seek out and confess our sins, tell God of our baffled hopes and broken fortunes and menacing decay, and cry unto Him, "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make known, in the turmoil and distress, in the judgments and chastisements of a guilty people, remember mercy!"¹

¹ Dr. Stöcker of Berlin, speaking of Germany, says, "Nowhere has so great a part of the population broken with the Church. Pro-

II

But it is in vain to utter that message for the conscience, if that is all there is to tell. Indeed, it would be a poor and false account of the revivalistic teaching of Jesus if we were to stop there. There was more, infinitely more. He spoke directly to man's sense of guilt as well as to his sense of right and wrong in behaviour; to his consciousness of sin and need of forgiveness as well as to his capacity for high ideals and aspirations for goodness and service. To the rebuke for the formalist He added a gospel for the guilty; to His denunciation of the selfish, a message of hope for the lost and despairing; and to His warning against covetousness and worry, a promise of pardon to the penitent. Man's sin was stupendously real to Him. He felt it acutely. He understood its awful consequences, saw that it separated man from God, quenched the life of the soul, and doomed him to conscious death; and, therefore, He laid the basis of a religion of reconciliation in a full and free pardon for sin. He breathed forgiveness as a living message to the most

testantism is sick, sick unto death. Individual expressions of Christian life are on the increase, but the organised Church is steadily losing influence and respect. The prophetic power is seldom experienced, and when it appears it finds little welcome. Nothing is valued in certain pious circles but revivals and missions. In the north and north-east the friends of Christianity are among the aristocracy and among the peasants; while the middle classes, the educated, industrial, commercial people, as well as the artisan and little tradesmen, are with few exceptions opposed to the Church; the working men of the towns, belonging as they often do to the social democratic party, being necessarily hostile."

guilty, and they looked up out of their grim despair and began to hope and live. He set it out in a parable which shows that God does not stand aloof from men, not even from the debased and foul, as the Church did, but goes out to seek them and embrace them, taking, as Augustine says, "ten steps to the soul of man for every step man takes back to God"; listening eagerly for the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me," and preferring it to the self-pleasing catalogue of the Pharisee's all-surpassing merits.

Here were the "fresh springs" for religion. In this revelation was exhaustless power of revival. For to see God redeeming men; redeeming them plenteously, forgiving them with joy; not good men merely, but harlots and thieves; lifting the burden of guilt and introducing peace and joy—to see this was the birth of a mighty and inextinguishable hope. Everything was possible if this was real. If God would do that, He would do anything, and man might become anything. There was no limit to his possibilities. He might become one with Jesus Christ; and like Jesus Christ, victorious over sin and the devil; like Him in union and communion of spirit with the Father, in whole-hearted dedication and obedience, in freedom and joy, heroic patience and death-daring courage. It is the law of Revival. Forgiveness first, amendment afterwards. Luther proclaimed it when to a Church that was blasphemously offering pardon for money he preached "justification by faith," the free gift of God's forgiveness to the trustful penitent. Calvin set it out

in his "doctrines of grace." Wesley reasserted it, to the joy and rejoicing of myriads. James Morison opened the doors of the kingdom for hundreds in Scotland by setting it forth. Moody made it the substance of his appeals. "It is Thy law! O Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep it."

III

Still we are not at the centre. The power of Jesus was not chiefly in His ideas. Indeed, they were not new. Jeremiah had announced the coming of the "Lord our Righteousness." Isaiah had fallen prostrate before the vision of the all-holy. Out of a full assurance of faith Micah had asked, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion upon us; He will tread our iniquities under foot: and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Psalmists and prophets had joined in the declaration that God blots out sin, that He dwells with the spirit that is contrite, and is ready to respond to the soul that cries, "Create within me a clean heart."

But "ideas," says George Eliot, "are poor ghosts until they have been embodied in persons." It is personality that counts. Christ revives and re-creates religion by being Himself the first Christian, the Author and Finisher of the faith. He casts the spell

of His personality over a few fishermen in the north—Andrew and Peter, James and John—and they respond to His fascination, feel His power, breathe His spirit, absorb with difficulty His ideas, and at last are caught up and enthused with the new religion He has given them, and go forth as messengers of a revived religion to the ends of the earth.

A manufacturer wanted to get at the secret of the production of honey. How did the bee do it? Could he not do it without the bee? He would try. He gathered the blossoms off a whole acre and reduced them to liquor, and found that, instead of honey, he had simply got a vat of sweetened water. The bee, working in a similar acre of flowers, produced honey. The manufacturer could not do the work of the bee. You cannot revive religion with a machine, a committee, a printing press, a big hall, a crowd. You must have your bee. It is Christ Himself—His grace, His charm, His devotion to His Father, His self-sacrifice—that we see filling this marvellous chapter in the history of the revival of religion.

But again, here is the law. "Produce persons, all else follows." When we look at the great awakening of the thirteenth century we see "the age of chivalry in religion," the figure of St. Francis and his devotion to the poor, St. Dominic and his preaching of repentance, of Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas. Sabatier, speaking of the time of the Reformation, has this passage: "Inflammable matter was everywhere scattered or concentrated—in the convents, the country

parishes, the universities; in the closets of the learned, the courts of the kings, the castles of the nobles, the corporations of burghers and of artisans. It needed only that a few strong individualities, concentrating in themselves the spirit and needs of the time, should arise and lift up their voices, and instantly, from north to south, a thousand incendiary centres would burst into flame, and the long-suppressed fire would overrun every province and enwrap all Society in its blaze. There is no other way to explain the sudden and prodigious influence of Luther in Germany, of Zwingli in Switzerland, of Farel and Calvin in the lands of the French tongue. By the response which their voices awakened we may judge of the impatience with which they had been awaited." It is the universal principle. Are we praying, "Wilt Thou not revive us again"? Yes, says God, when you are willing to be utterly given over to Me, entirely dedicated, a living flame, in My service!

IV

But we must go farther inward still! Look at the record, and you see that what is at the bottom of this revival of religion is the death of Christ on the cross.

His teaching had done little: it had stirred hatred, opposition, scorn, persecution, and rejection. His gracious and winsome personality had achieved more than His teaching; still, not much. Lazarus and his sisters had felt it and responded to it like flowers to

the sun. There was a small group of disciples who admired and even adored, though they did not wholly understand Him ; but it seems that if His ministry had ended in the ordinary way, His name would have been as undistinguished as that of Hillel or Shammai. *The revival breaks out after Jesus is dead.* There is some stir in Jewish life prior to His crucifixion : His miracles startle, His preaching attracts and repels ; but religion does not ascend to its new path till His death. **Pentecost follows Calvary.**

What does that mean ? You have the answer in the Apocalypse. There is in the seer's heaven a book which nobody can open. It is sealed. "Will nobody come," cries the apostle, "and break the seals and read the message of the book?" Only one is worthy. It is the Lamb in the midst of the throne, the Lamb slain, the Christ who suffered for human redemption, who is capable of taking this mystery of God and explaining it to men. "He was wounded for our transgressions," He entered into humanity, took the woes and curses and plagues of men upon Himself, became one with men, bore their burdens, and entered so completely into their lives as to make them His. He is obedient ; yes, but to what ? To death ; ay, to the death of the cross. It is soon said : it is never fathomed. He is one, entirely one, with our humanity—with its lost causes, its sins and curse—and is buried beneath its heaped-up iniquities. He dies with it, and for it, and into it. He identifies Himself with it, and is it. "God was in Christ" ; but Christ was in humanity, reconciling this

sundered mass of sinful, perverse manhood to Himself; winning it, lifting it out of its despairs, and filling it with hope, and firing it with holy zeal for God and right.

Yes, my brethren, that is where the Church fails. It refuses the cross. We have it in the pulpit and the manuscript; it is in our literature and amongst our ornaments; but it is not in our lives. We preach the "cross," we talk of the "blood"; but we choose the easier places in life, seek the primrose path of dalliance, and we will not take the sorrows and plagues of men upon our own hearts. We are as the world: we do not share the shame, the sacrifice, the toil, the loss, the death of Jesus. We are cowards, afraid to offend. It is not enough for a disciple to be like his Master; we seek to be different. We must avoid His fate at all costs. We dare not, like the Founder of Christianity, run the risk of being cast out of the very Church whose religion He revives, put to death at the instigation of its priests and through the action of its political tools, and pass away without the slightest sign of a moral resurrection. No, no; we will not bear the cross, and so we sigh in vain for a revival of religion.

Courage, self-abandon, white-hot zeal, readiness to face loss and woe, have been the qualities of the men who have revived religion. They have been cast out and despised rather than fêted by the rich and sought out and lionised by the titled. They suffered for the gospel. It is the radical and deepest-going difference

between Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus did a great work. His criticism was severe, drastic, and penetrating; his exposure of abuses was mordant and deadly; his ethical teaching was clear and strong—but there was no cross in his life; he did not suffer for the truth; he would not offend those who might have put him to death; and therefore he lacked the creative energy that makes the dead alive and brings into being a new development of religion.

George Fox endured a great fight of afflictions. Jonathan Edwards bore an indescribably dreary banishment for his fidelity. Wesley was hissed, hooted, despised, persecuted, forsaken, thrust out of the Church of his youth. James Morison was condemned by the Presbytery for heresy, ejected from the United Secession Church, and excluded from ministerial communion. General Booth flung himself into the chasm in which lay the submerged tenth, rescued them from their doom, and quickened the spiritual pulse of the world. Yes! Were we only ready to enter into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, we should soon enter the gracious influences of a revived religion.

V

That this is the true path of revival is made clear by the ideals which Jesus gives to His disciples. What a man accomplishes is largely dependent upon his ideal. A low ideal makes a low man, a bad ideal a bad man; a high ideal goes far towards making a

true man. Cromwell's soldiers were men who held Cromwell's ideals and carried about with them his picture of the true soldier's life. Christ gives us His ideal of our life in the Sermon on the Mount, which every Christian should know so thoroughly that he can instantly use it for self-rebuke, guidance, and inspiration. Look at it, and you will see that Christ makes what the *world* calls "extreme men," "immoderate men," "visionaries," "enthusiasts," "fanatics," "anarchists."

The world's "average man" is His abomination. Fixing His eyes on His disciples, He says: "Blessed are you poor, because the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be fed. Blessed are you who now weep aloud, because you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and exclude you from their societies, insult you, and scorn your very name for the Son of Man's sake. Be glad at such a time and dance for joy."

What folly! How absurd! Fancy dancing for joy because you are exorcised from Society, insulted, and your name cast out as an evil thing! "Be glad and dance for joy, for your reward is great in heaven; for that is just the way their forefathers behaved to the prophets."

You read your *Times*. The *Times*, I suppose, is the paper of the average man. Do you ever get a line like that in the *Times*? The *Morning Post* is said to be the paper of Society. Does the *Morning Post* utter a beatitude of that sort? Is that its ideal of happiness?

“What do ye *more* than others?”—that is the Master’s word to you and me. You are not to be content with the life of the average man; you are to pass him on the road, leave him in the distance, and ascend to higher, nobler, and greater things. Christ’s ideal of happiness is one which transcends in its character all the ideals of the average man.

Again, we believe that compassion is a duty; that pity ought to go forth from our hearts towards certain classes of the community. We pity the people of the slums, and mourn for those who have not enough of the world’s goods. What does Jesus say? “Alas for you rich men, because you already have your consolation; alas for you who now have plenty to eat, because you will be hungry; alas for you who laugh now, because you will mourn and weep aloud. Alas for you when men shall all have spoken well of you, for that is just the way their forefathers behaved to the false prophets.”

That is not the way our compassions go out. We have pity, but it is not for the rich; we have compassion, but it is not for those whose laughter rings loud and startles the passer-by. We misread life and misunderstand its significance, and so our compassions are wasted and our sympathies lead us astray.

But perhaps more than anything else Christ ascends beyond the average in His ideals of conduct. Hear Him! “But to you who are listening to Me, I say, Love your enemies, seek the welfare of those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who

revile you ; to him who gives you a blow on one side of your face, offer the other side also ; and to him who is robbing you of your outer garment, refuse not the under one also ; and behave to your fellow-man just as you would have them behave to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is it to you ? It is only another form of selfishness. Why, even bad men love those who love them ; and if you are kind to those who are kind to you, what credit is it to you ? Even bad men act thus. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive again an equal amount, what credit is it to you ? Love your enemies, be beneficent, and lend without hoping for any repayment."

I know we are in open revolt against this teaching, but at least let us accept the fact that Jesus Christ did set these high ideals, transcending the aims and achievements of the average man, before His disciples. This is what they are to aim at. They are not to take the standards of the Hebrew Church as their standards, nor accept its laws as their laws ; but to take their directions straight from Him—their standards of happiness, of compassion, and of conduct. The question is, What do you *more than others* ? Where is your *extra* ? In what do you surpass other people ? Why, it is the common talk, is it not, of the men outside the Church that the deacon is not a whit better than somebody else who does not belong to the Church ; that this man, who goes regularly to a place of worship, has the same passions and methods in his business as

the man who does not go? The world is not quarrelling with Christianity as a revelation of ideals, but with the low morality of Christian people. We are not in front. Well, can you expect us to be in front? Did not a Christian leader say that you never could create and govern a State upon the principles of the Sermon on the Mount? He did. But then we have never fairly tried. We have been content, and we are content now, and it is our condemnation that we are content, to have a morality on the ordinary levels of human thinking, instead of knowing that we are meant to surpass in all moral and spiritual qualities those who do not acknowledge the mastery of Christ.

Hence there has never been a revival of religion which has not created an advance party—a party that either has left the Church in order to find a home for itself, or else carried the Church to a higher level. Ezra's revival did. The Pharisees were born in his day, and in the day of their birth they were the party of righteousness, the party of self-sacrifice, discontented with the ordinary morality, and they ascended and ascended to the loftiest heights of Judaic righteousness and faith. But how were the mighty fallen in the days of Jesus Christ! In the language of Zangwill, this was the "period of the smug Pharisee, profiting by the martyrdoms of their ancestors, babbling rhetorically—between two pleasures—of their fidelity to the faith of their fathers." The fire, the throb of passion, the colour, the heroic dash were gone. All was dreary, dull, monotonous, and repulsive as the grave.

But Jesus created a party that leapt at a bound in front of the current religion of the Church, became the upholders of the moral life of the world, saved the soul of humanity, and gave it a chance of really and truly living. It was a party in advance ethically, spiritually; a type of character almost if not altogether new was developed. The average man was left behind, and a definite ascent was made and never completely lost—an ascent in the whole life of man. Jesus did not choose men of conspicuous prudence, masters of the art of balancing probabilities, skilled in sitting on the fence, paragons of discretion, never likely to be betrayed into committing themselves. "Extreme" men were His choice. He wanted life in men, movement, energy, impulse, fire; not careful diplomats of pinched decorum and smiling correctitude. The revival of religion He inspired put bodies of men in the forefront of the life of the world, protesting against its consecrated evils, and making an end of them, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness.

Every revival of religion ought to inspire men ready for the front; men who will not be content to do their "level best," but to attempt Christ's "best"; who will lead the attack on all that is opposed to the spirit of Christ and the well-being of men. That is their place. It is not pride to go in front; it is cowardice to stay behind. It is not vanity that leads; it is selfishness, fear of infamy and shame, that keep men in the background. Wycliffe's preachers must lift up their voice, and by their work advance the Reformation.

Luther is the herald of a Protestantism that still feeds the forces of all that is best in civilisation. George Fox calls into being the party of the "inner light," and that light never was more widely diffused than now.¹ Edwards lifted the religious life of America to a higher plane. Surely the revival that is now at the doors will issue in the uprising of a great host who will lead us out of our present confusions and errors, falsehoods and vices, into the clear air of the fulness of a life interpenetrated and quickened by the Spirit of God.

VI

Christ's ideals would drive us to despair had we not the promise of His all-sufficing power and the actual indwelling of His spirit. He said to the men who heard His exacting words, "I will come to you. I will not leave you orphaned, bereft of lead and strength, and solace and hope. I will come, and come to stay. I *am* with you all the days; and as the Father and I are one, so you and I are one." Exactly so they found it. He came. Their new life was the love of two souls in all-mastering affection for each other: their lives made one, identified, never entirely apart, if not always in conscious fellowship, yet a real fellowship

¹ "But never is it to be forgotten that at the head of the very mixed multitudes which are lining up under the banners of peace to command the arbitration of international differences and promote the brotherhood of the race, marches the little, yet potent, 'Society of Friends,' whose benignant presence has kept the heart of the world warmer and its hope of peace alive."—*The Commons*, p. 455, October 1904.

summoned into consciousness by the slightest pulse of the soul it ever pervades. That was the new experience, the unescapable presence of Christ. He was with them, working with them everywhere. Paul exhibits that experience in its completest form; but it is an experience that is not strange or inexplicable to those who know. I live—no! it is no longer I that live. It is a new ego, a new unit; it is Christ Himself who has taken possession of my life, and pervades it so conqueringly that that life is Christ, Christ Himself. He is all and in all—strength, life, peace, joy, serenity, success. I go before Nero, but He stands by. I suffer shipwreck, but He keeps me from sinking. I fight with beasts at Ephesus, but He wins. I die daily, and yet I live, because He lives in me.

The sense of separateness from God is gone. We think Him in every thought of ourselves, and every plan we make and every object we pursue. We take our orders from His lips. Not a step do we take without Him. We receive out of "His fulness and grace upon grace," till the whole man is filled, and pervaded with the Divine sense of sonship to God. This makes the boor a seer, the slave a master, the pupil an instructor, and the defeated a victor. "When I am weak, then am I strong." "I can do," or bear, "all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

Thus every revival of religion is the advent of the God of religion to the soul, the coming of His Spirit—the Spirit of truth and love and power; and the uprising of the spirit of man in faith and in self-surrender to

the Spirit of God. Turn to any real revival of religion, and it repeats the second chapter of the Book of the Acts. It tells of a Pentecost. "The impulse of the Great Awakening was a theological conviction which took shape in Edwards' mind, a belief in the immediate action of the Divine Spirit upon the human soul."

This, then, is our rest and hope as we cry out for a revival: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

IX

THE SERVICE OF JESUS TO JOHN THE BAPTIST

MY subject is the work that Christ Jesus did for John, called the Baptist ; my text and starting-point are found in the Gospel of John called the Apostle i. 6, 7 and iii. 26-30.

We often talk of the work that John the Baptist did for the Lord Jesus Christ, but not very frequently, if at all, of the work that Jesus did for John the Baptist. The ministry of the preacher on the banks of the Jordan on behalf of his cousin is fully recognised ; the greater ministry of the Saviour for His forerunner is almost, if not altogether, ignored. We see the herald, picturesquely clad, as with clarion notes he calls men to repentance, and announces the arrival of the long-desired and eagerly expected Deliverer ; but we forget the strange spell that had already been cast over that preacher's soul by Jesus ; the perplexing questions His beautiful character had started, and the awe which His worth had already inspired. We linger over the pathetic figure of the prophet initiating a religious revolution and then

unselfishly stepping aside to make way for the Teacher whose sandal-strap he, in his modesty, said he was not worthy to unfasten. Now I want you to see that John owed to Jesus a debt beyond all price; that Jesus not only captured his imagination and won his confidence, but also broadened his outlook, poured the wine of joy into his heart, evoked new forces within his soul, liberated his energies, developed his thought, fired his zeal, strengthened his will, fortified his convictions, set rainbows of hope in the clouded sky of his life, and added incalculable values to his life as a prophet and as a worker for the coming kingdom of his God and ours.

You know that John himself had no misgiving as to the nature of his relations to Jesus. To the scholars and critics who challenged his authority as a reformer, he confessed frankly, and at once, that he was not the Christ. He made it clear that he regarded himself merely as a guide-post to the new era—that and nothing more; in no sense the creator of the new era itself. He was a “lamp”—a lamp burning and shining and gladdening men “for a season,” but still a lamp, and not the central sun, that, coming into the world, lights every man. He came, as he said, not as the Light itself, but for a witness to the Light; and he did his work because he stood in the midst of that Light’s burning radiance, and from the cleansed and polished surfaces of his soul reflected that Light, and sent it forth as a Divine illuminant and radiant energy, enabling men to find their way not only from the gloom of a corrupted Mosaism, but also from the

twilight of John's own teaching, into the clearer and fuller revelation of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The fact is, men cannot enter into definite relations with Jesus Christ as students or reformers, as prophets or heralds of His ideas, and remain exactly what they were before. It is impossible. Your Dr. Harper¹ said: "The average college man receives as much benefit from his fellow-students as from the officers of instruction in the college." Carlyle said: "Souls grow by contact with souls." There is destiny in the soul's relationship to personalities, and pre-eminently in its relation to the most unique personality that ever lived and wrought upon our earth. The lowliest service rendered to Christ yields its reward. No man can really lose by parting with his most cherished treasure for Christ's sake; he receives in this life a hundredfold more, though it may be "with persecutions." For one to touch the hem of His garment has been the stoppage of a wasted life and the renewal of its forces at the springs. The brave pioneers of righteousness and justice, liberty and equality of opportunity, social reform and civic regeneration, are themselves quickened in spirit, enlarged in soul, and equipped for service by Him in ways they do not fully know.

You cannot make it easier for a soul to trust the Eternal Father, to know Him and His Son, Jesus Christ,

¹ This sermon was preached as the Convocation sermon before the University of Chicago, of which Dr. W. R. Harper was Principal for several years.

to realise Him in the actual and throbbing life of the world, without becoming more largely than ever a partaker of God yourself. It is a spiritual law, and John the Baptist is one splendid example of its working. He was a great prophet—one of the greatest—and he gave the service of a brave, self-suppressing soul to Jesus Christ; but what Jesus gave to him John himself did not fully know, and certainly no tongue can ever fully tell.

Still, it is possible to gather from the Gospels some evidence of the character and range of the work that Jesus did for John; and it is that evidence I wish briefly to cite. But at the outset, and in order that we may estimate the service of Christ to John aright, we ought to form as accurate an idea as we can of the spiritual rank and religious equipment of the Baptist at the time when there arose in his consciousness the conviction that it was his one business in life to show openly to Israel that Jesus was the anointed of God, and the creator of a new epoch in the religious life of mankind.

Only a few facts are available for our use, but these show, first, that John broke in upon the life of his time as the foremost man in religion; an unsurpassed expert in the things of the soul; a supreme master of the spiritual life. He knew more about real religion than the greatest of the teachers of his day, and saw more clearly into its essential nature than all the leaders of the Hebrew Church. To him, religion was inward, vital, aggressive, and completely ethical. In fact, in

his perception of the inmost soul of all religion, John the Baptist was infinitely nearer to the Christianity of Christ Jesus than he was to the current Judaism of the synagogues and of the schools. That Judaism was his despair. It afflicted him beyond all bearing. It was hollow as a big drum and barren as a dead tree. It was a deception and a snare. He writhed with indignation as he thought of it, and he flamed out with scorching speech against the greed, the insincerity, and hard formalism of the recognised authorities of Jewish religious life. As they gathered about him, he burst forth in his fiery wrath, saying, "O viper's brood, who has warned you to flee from the coming wrath! Give up your pretence! Be real! Get rid of the falsehoods to which you cling! Repent, and let your lives prove your change of heart. Give up your trust in your Abrahamic descent! It is sheer folly. God can and does raise up seed to your godly ancestors out of the stones of a despised paganism. Your Pharisaic legalism is no defence against the penalties of wrongdoing. The axe is at the bole of the trees now, and if the fruit is not good they will be cut down and flung into the fire, in spite of the fact that the trees were growing within the sacred enclosure of Hebraism." It is the distinction of John the Baptist that he unequivocally gave to the men of his day a completely spiritual interpretation of the religion that is acceptable to God.

In that primarily, but in much besides, John was a prophet, and, as Jesus says, "far more than a prophet." He is the crowning glory of "the goodly fellowship of

the prophets" of the older time, and he opens the splendid pageant of that coming race of New Testament prophets which is destined to lead the Christianity of Jesus to the possession of all the world.

Look at him! He is no reed shaken by the winds of scorn and hate; he is a sturdy oak that grips the solid earth more tightly after every storm. He is no courtier, offering lip service to those in authority, basking in the sunshine of luxury, and babbling vacuous phrases in kings' houses; he is a plain, blunt man, uttering straight from the soul the truth he sees, to king and to peasant alike. He drinks no wine, though he lives amongst a people who make it and sell it and drink it, and he is laughed at for his abstemious ways and described as a devil-haunted man; but he has chosen the one right path, and nothing can make him wander from it by a hair's breadth.

George Henry Lewes says: "You measure the strength of a beam by its weakest part, but that of a man by his strongest." What a revelation of strength is here—strength of thought and of will, of courage and of patience, of loyalty to conscience and to God! You may as easily bribe the tides of the irresistible sea as you can this Baptist, and as readily grind the mountains to powder as detach him from his purpose. Every way he is great—in his insight and in his fidelity, in his pluck and in his persistence, in his zeal and in his activity. The Pharisees saw his greatness, and, in the hope that he might lead them to better days, submitted to his baptism. The Sadducees felt the

spell of his austerity and the fire of his enthusiasm, and could not keep away. Jesus, that infallible judge of character, told the multitude "that among all of women born, no greater man had been raised up than John the Baptist." It is obvious that in this John there is a stricter justice than in Aristides, a sterner censor than Cato, a more devoted patriot than Regulus, a greater prophet than Elijah or Jeremiah, a finer courage than in John Huss or bold Hugh Latimer. Of the whole race of prophets he is incontestably the greatest.

Is it surprising, then, that a hero of such strength and devotion should have been treated as though he owed nothing to his contemporaries—not even to Jesus? Are you astonished that readers of the New Testament have hesitated to trace to other personal sources the great gifts he possessed and the marvellous influence he exerted?

And yet, believe me, it is the positive values Jesus Christ added to his personal worth, the wealth of character with which He enriched him, that gave John his fullest right to link together the Old and New Testaments, and secured his place in the Gospels as showing what Jesus Christ can do for men of the highest spiritual rank and of the finest religious character. True, the records are very scant; but examination will prove to us that they tell us enough to make manifest that John owed his growth in the noble qualities of his manhood to Jesus Christ, and was indebted to Him for the disposition and achievements

which add so much charm to his life and effectiveness to his career.

They show (1) that Jesus gave to John the assured hope of the arrival of a new humanity, filled him with overflowing joy, and toned his ascetic nature to the key of delight. They show (2) that Jesus dowered him with the grace by which he resolutely put all personal aims and gains out of sight in his passionate devotion to the kingdom of God. They show (3) that He soothed his spirit when chafed with doubts and fears, and fed his patience and fortitude in his imprisonment.

I

Listen, for example, to the colloquy between John and his disciples concerning his waning popularity, the fall in the number of candidates for his baptism, and the break-up of his school. "Your work is failing," they say; "the crowds are leaving you and going after Him whom you baptized on the other side of Jordan. You are being displaced. Already the lustre of your fame is dimmed!" "Yes," says John, "no doubt. I do not question it. But you are not reading the events rightly."

And then, a new tone is heard in the preacher's voice; an accent of gladness comes into his speech; and he says: "You see the facts, but you do not see what they mean. This is no funereal business. Here is no occasion for tears! Tears! Never! Far rather, let the bells in all the towers be rung! A new and

more fruitful day is at the dawn. A new and happier home for the wandering sons of God is being built!"

And then the festivity of his spirit gives wings to his imagination, and he sees himself no longer a prosaic pedagogue beating knowledge into reluctant minds. No! he is the best man at a wedding, charged by the bridegroom with all the arrangements; moving hither and thither with buoyant step, or waiting with listening ear for the voice of the happy bridegroom returning with his bride. A new and happier beginning is being made for the human race! A new and better home is planned! Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, is uniting Himself in indissoluble bonds with humanity; and the joy of John is completed by the simple fact that he has the unspeakable honour to be the bridegroom's friend.

What an unexpected development! I hear you say as you listen to John beating his music out. Is this the voice we heard crying a little while ago with such fiery energy, "Repent"? Is this the man who had brooded over the evils of the land as he wandered in the wilderness to the west of the Dead Sea, marking the barren trees ready for the fire, and noting the vipers fleeing before the burning scrub? Is this the man who came, neither eating nor drinking with his fellows, but standing in fierce disapproval, aloof from the table of life, but who is now bursting into festive song, assured that the work of God is going forward from victory to victory?

It is even so; and this is an entirely new tone

coming from a new soul. You know that in all bell foundries there is a process which is called the toning of the bell. The bell has been cast according to carefully calculated measurements as to height and width, as to the composition of the metal and the thickness of it; but it has to be toned, so that it may give the exact note required when it is struck. The bell-founder takes his hammer, and is prepared to test and tone the bell. But close by him is a man with a violin, and before the bell-maker strikes the bell the violinist draws his bow across the strings, whilst the bell-maker listens intently to catch the note. Then he strikes; and if the bell does not give the tone required, the thickness of the bell or the depth of it is reduced until the right pitch is secured.

Every human life is subjected to a toning process. Some of us have a hard and metallic note, and the music of our life goes on and on, from day to day, jarring sensitive souls. We need to be toned to the sweetness of the music of the cross. Others have a dull and muffled note of sadness and dejection, of mourning and lamentation, and they require to be toned to the raptures of the Easter Morn. John's note, when we first hear it, is harsh, denunciatory, severe, without the softness that is born of pity for the weaknesses of men and the gladness that springs from hope in God. But Christ gives it a new tone, a tone of deep joy and of expectation of the brighter day. He brings John into tune with the infinite. He draws from his spirit the sweet melodies and inspiring strains that

ring through his conversation with his disciples. The joy of the Lord Jesus is his strength. His character advances toward completeness. Christ has filled in its gaps and given it fulness and harmony. The Baptist lifts up his eyes and sees the fields white for harvest, and, exultant, he goes forth to meet what looked like an overwhelming personal disaster with thanksgiving and the voice of praise.

Emerson says: "The best part of health is fine disposition. Nothing will supply the want of sunshine to peaches. Whenever you are sincerely pleased, you are nourished. The joy of the spirit indicates its strength; healthy things are sweet-tempered." That is the witness of experience. Joy is power. Glad men are strong. It is the statesman Ezra who boldly faces a city and a nation in utter ruin, and at once bids his fellow-sufferers to clothe themselves in festive garb and celebrate a day of thanksgiving as they rebuild the fallen commonwealth, assured that the joy of the Lord is their strength. It is Paul who gives thanks in everything; who, in the face of colossal difficulties and unequalled oppositions, continues in his gigantic task of making a new world out of the Roman Empire through the gospel of Christ.

And it is that very joy of God—what Emerson calls "the joy of the spirit"—that men who have started with a high-hearted belief in life and its possibilities most deeply need. Prophets are not often happy men. Most of them write chapters of lamentation if they do not write books. The "weary weight of this

unintelligible world" hangs heavily upon their souls. "Much knowledge brings much sorrow." Thinkers are, as a rule, a melancholy race. The Book of Ecclesiastes is no gospel. It is easy to be eloquently optimistic if you are only sufficiently ignorant. It is insight that locks the lips. Schopenhauer was a big goblet filled with dejection. Nietzsche thought himself into insanity. Hamlet is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. The complex and contradictory facts of life go far to quench hope and joy in life.

The man with a burning hatred of wrong and a passion for sincerity suffers many a trial of his faith both in God and in man. The earnest and meditative student of men sees the seamy side of life: the crafty tax-gatherers who exact more than the legal amount; the soldier-police, who, not content with their wages, lay false charges for the sake of gain, and intimidate and bribe. A great scholar asked me the other day whether I had not to force myself to speak so confidently of the joy of life, and to figure the future in emblems of exultation and gladness. I am not surprised. We cannot escape the tragical elements of life. The youngest of us soon suffer "disillusion" unless we have fellowship with Him who is the pledge of an eternal progress, as well as the mediator of an everlasting redemption; the guarantee that the best is yet to be, as well as the author of the best we now enjoy.

We all need, especially those young men and women who dare to accept the highest ideals, to attempt to attain to the noblest, to refuse to be withered by

sensuality, or choked by prosperity, or drowned in dullness—we all need the help of Christ to live eagerly and joyfully, doing each day's work without haste and without rest, without worry and with calm. In fellowship with Christ we shall be able to say with Browning—

“What is life to me?

Where'er I look is fire; where'er I listen

Music; and where I tend, bliss for evermore.”

II

But Jesus wrought a greater work for John than even that—a work going deeper into his soul and effecting a more radical revolution in his experience. He set him free from the paralysing effects of pride in his own work, from vanity as to his personal standing, and constrained him, not merely to accept, but rejoicingly to welcome, the widening advance of the kingdom of God. Christ made him entirely selfless, nobly magnanimous, and carried him to the highest ranges of saintly character and deed. Without that victory over the lower self, John would have been little more than a Rabbi Hillel or Shammai, Gamaliel or Akbar; but through the expulsive power of his new affection for Christ, he takes his loss of place and power with delight. There is not the slightest trace of littleness in his great soul. Not a single stain of self is on his work. He is the greatest of the prophets. Elijah is so self-centred that when he fails he goes whining into the wilderness and wants to die; and on another

occasion he is so unbalanced that in his self-sufficiency he slays eight hundred and fifty men who had opposed him. Jeremiah, seeing his ideals smashed in the streets, frankly charges God with deceiving him, and in his hot impatience curses the day of his birth. But John sees his successes slipping out of his fingers one after another, his school of reformers going to pieces before his eyes; and not only does he not say a word against it, but actually takes a large share in hastening the dissolution of his own college and in building up the fame and prosperity of his rival.

"Look!" says he to the young men he has been teaching, "Look! there is your real master." Pointing to Jesus, he exclaims: "He is the Teacher you must follow! Pass on to Him! Go! He is God's Lamb sent to make an end of sin and to bring in an everlasting righteousness."

"And again," says the record; "again," not once only, but "again"; "the next day," too, as though John would hurry along what most men would have regarded as a dire catastrophe. "Again," John was standing with two of his disciples, and as Jesus was passing by, he said, "Look! behold, this is the Lamb of God," and the two disciples heard his exclamation (and the writer obviously recalls it with admiration and gratitude), "and they followed Jesus." Could magnanimity, I ask you, further go? Is not this Baptist standing on the very summit of Christian greatness?

I say "Christian greatness." Follow Christ's work in John, and see what it meant.

Life is the emergence of the consciousness of self, of our individuality, of our separation from things, of our *ego*, with all our potential wealth and responsibility; and yet, so strangely are we built that life reaches its maximum energy when the self we have thus formed is forgotten in completest use of our gifts for highest and most universal ends. Know you not that it is self-consciousness that is always crippling us—that blotches the artist's canvas, spoils the singer's song, jars the orator's speech, and takes the power out of the preacher's sermon? Self-obliviousness is the condition of personal effectiveness. It expands the soul and ennobles all its products. Dr. Dale told D. L. Moody that he could not see any relation between him, his preaching, and the effects that followed. Moody laughed, and said he was glad to hear it. I do not accept Dr. Dale's assumption for a moment. The relation could not have been closer between cause and effect than it was between Moody and those results. It was the complete consecration of the man that raised his spiritual forces to the highest power and rendered him a wonderfully fit vehicle for the soul-converting energies of the Spirit of God.

A recent critic of Ruskin says: "The root of all his troubles, and the reason why he needed and received so heavy and persistent a chastening, was his dogmatic and self-righteous spirit"; and then A. C. Benson adds: "The spirit of dogmatism, of intellectual and spiritual pride is, I make no doubt, the most dangerous and deadly quality in the world." Now Christ made the

entrance of that demon into John impossible. Jesus was there Himself, and was there first, and there was no room for that devil. He filled his soul and closed the gates to his access, and therefore the glad seer stood before the palpable transfer of the results of his beloved work to the hands of Jesus with a conviction nothing could shake, saying, "He must increase." He! It is part of the nature of things. "He comes after me, but He is preferred before me, for He was before me." He must increase. It is inevitable. "I must decrease." A sane judgment cannot reach any other conclusion. He is first. He takes the highest rank. My personal ends and gains are as the dust of the balance compared with the justice of His claims and the establishment of His kingdom.

Not suddenly and in a moment was that conversion effected, but by slow stages and after many combats with himself John had won that victory. The triumph came late. There was no sign of it, I imagine, when they met as boys in the home of Elizabeth or of Mary; nor when they discussed the deep things of God as young men in Nazareth. It was far otherwise. No! we are too near one another to recognise an undemonstrated greatness. "I did not know Him," says John; "but that He might be openly showed to Israel, I have come baptizing in water." He felt the mystery of Jesus' personality, and yet hardly confessed it. He was once and again stirred to wonder and inquiry as before an utterly inexplicable force. He was even filled with awe in His presence; and when Jesus, caught

in the great revolutionary movement, asked for baptism at John's hands in token of His adhesion to it, and that He might forward righteousness, the Baptist immediately shrank from enrolling Him as a penitent. That could not be! It was not meet! But at length, though it cost him much, John yielded to the wish of Christ to enter the ranks of the pledged advocates of justice, and baptized him; and then Jesus was further transfigured before his astonished gaze. The attesting witness solved his problems, ended his fears, convinced him that He was the dearly-loved Son of the Father and the rightful ruler of John himself and of his disciples.

So at last the new John appears. The prophet is converted. The herald is now the disciple. The pioneer is a new creation, and a new creation in Christ Jesus; less denunciatory and more genial, less censorious and more persuasive; not so violent in his recoil from the stupid crowd, for he has more hope of seeing that penitence in men which is the angels' joy. The harsh notes pass out of his speech. The glad music of his unselfish soul expresses his abiding joy in the invincible conviction that through Christ man and God are reconciled and made one for ever!

"Depend upon it," says Carlyle, "the brave man has somehow or other to give his life away." He has. The surrender must be made, and it cannot be made on terms and conditions of our own framing. It is inevitable, if we are to make the best of our existence, that we surrender to that great and awful will whose

workings are all around us and are predestined to triumph in the end. "God must increase." That is the primal and indefensible law. The backbone of our self-will must be broken. Our stubbornness must go. "We must decrease." "We must." It irks us to admit it, but "we must." "He must increase." It is the Great Imperative. His will is our peace, the acceptance of it is our liberty, and obedience to it is our blessedness here and for evermore. Learn that in the school of Jesus, and you have learned the best lesson even He has to teach.

III

Only in the briefest manner need I say anything as to the way in which Jesus became, in the dark and cloudy day of John's imprisonment, his gracious and kindly friend, soothing his anxious spirit, driving away his doubts, reviving his faith, and nourishing his patient endurance. The scene is most familiar. The Baptist's bold attack on kingly vice has brought him into trouble, as such speech will. He is in prison, and the solitude of the cell tests his faith and strains his hope to the breaking point. In a fit of despair he asks two of his disciples (for some of them still feel the mastery of his leadership) to visit Jesus and seek evidence of His Messianic mission. Not a word of censure on the doubter escapes the lips of Jesus. It is not His way. He welcomes the inquirers as one who delights to see men engaged in the resolute search for truth, and then meets the seekers by giving them a set of concrete

facts. His appeal is directly to the realities of experience. "Tell John," He says, "what you see and what you hear," and then, lifting the meaning of all His work up to the heights of a bold generalisation, full of comfort to the spirit of the social reformer now immured in jail, He says, "Assure him that the poor have the gospel preached to them." That was the good news for such a strong evangelistic soul in its perplexity. It was bread for his famishing spirit, medicine for his sickness, and comfort for his heart.

My friends, it is not easy always to keep the heights the soul is competent to gain. All our hours are not hours of insight. Few of us escape paroxysms of scepticism and spasms of despair. "The trial of our faith" is sure to come sooner or later; but this is our rejoicing that the Redeemer of our souls understands all the perplexities of the intellect as well as the sorrows of the heart and the bafflings of the will. If we seek Him we shall surely find Him, and in Him the message that will help us to face our temptations, endure a great fight of affliction, and hold fast the beginning of our confidence to the end.

He who is the bright and morning star of the world's hope, the ever-flowing fountain of man's purest joy, the cross on which the false self is crucified, and the throne on to which the new self is raised, is also the sure cure for our doubts and the unfailing solace of our spirits in the hour of our need. Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Him.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter. Jesus Christ adds to the spiritual wealth of the wealthiest, increases incalculably the moral values of the strongest, of the best drilled and most capable, the prophets of new eras, the leaders of thought and action, the reformers of society, the races at the summit of civilisation. John's history is typical. He is a pattern-proof of the work of Christ, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Two men illumine the work of the Saviour on strong souls: one is His chief herald, the other His greatest apostle—John the Baptist and Paul of Tarsus, two of the greatest of woman born. They show us what God has done and is doing. The law came by Moses. He is one of the founders of religion. Jesus adds to the gift of Moses the outflowing grace of the Eternal Father, the indestructible truth and reality of the final revelation of God. To Confucius, with his profound reverence of the past and his gratitude for ancestors and the heritage they have left us, Christ adds the charm of truths that are ever fresh and inspirations that are always new. Buddha rises to the heights of self-sacrifice, but loses conscious life in a Nirvana. Jesus inspires the sacrifice of the lower self, but also makes possible the highest self-realisation in a life that is eternal and is eternally conscious and blessed in blessing. To Mahomet. Ah! if only Mahomet had gone to school to Jesus Christ! How different the world's history would have been! He would not only have restored to its place the lost doctrine of the Divine unity, but he would have been

held back from his destructive wars and from his fatal degradation of woman.

"It is a faithful saying," writes Paul, giving a fragment of speech current in the early Church, "and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The career of John the Baptist shows that Jesus came into the world to save prophets, reformers, students, and that that is part of His work of saving sinners. He came to save you: to lead you from combat to combat with the vanities and illusions of inexperience; to make you victorious over false ambitions; to enable you to exorcise selfishness and greed, pride and self-will; to rule in your will, and mould you into a strong and robust manhood, wise and knowing, strong and gentle, broad in sympathy and heroic in effort; to save you from whining over life's defeats and contradictions, from yielding to the hot fevers of passion and the follies of licence, from accepting low ideals and mean motives and self-centred aims; to allure and captivate you—not by calling you to ease, but to effort; not by feeding the hope of chasing pleasures, but by summoning you to wrestle with difficulty, destroy evil, and establish righteousness, justice, and liberty. That is the work He has done for men. That is the work He is doing to-day.

Some time ago a minister visited a college to tell the students about India, and to invite them to become missionaries to the people of Hindustan. He assured them they would have a good time, a decent house with a sheltering veranda and plenty of servants to wait

upon them. Not a man volunteered ! A few months afterward, a man went to the same college from the Congo to ask for volunteers to step into the gaps which had been made by missionaries who had lost their lives. He said to them, "It will most likely mean death to you"; but six of them forthwith offered their services. It is Christ's way. He calls those who will press through the narrow gate. He asks for the chosen few, the brave minority who will not be content to seek the higher life, but must have the highest, and will eagerly and whole-heartedly give the gospel of Christ its fullest application to every interest and institution in our universal life. He calls now ! I hear His voice sounding over this audience, saying, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers, saviours of men !" Who is it that says, "Here am I, Lord ; accept me" ?

X

“STRONG SON OF GOD”

“There cometh One mightier than I after me.”—MARK i. 7.

JOHN the Baptist was a strong man, and he knew it. His power was revealed to him in the crowds that gathered to listen to his resonant voice as he stood on the banks of the Jordan summoning the people of Israel to repentance. He could not possibly fail to recognise the greatness of his strength. The Pharisees and scribes, the leaders of the religious life of the day, had gathered in great crowds ; men of different ranks had come out for the purpose of hearing what he had to say, and his voice so penetrated their consciences that, openly, they confessed their sins. John was a reformer—a bold, uncompromising, ascetic reformer. He knew that things needed to be altered, and he was determined to get them changed as speedily as he possibly could. He saw the exaggerated conceit which dominated the popular religion ; he recognised the pride and self-righteousness which took the place of humility and of trust in God, and therefore he spoke with the utmost strength of conviction, of fiery vehemence, of

austere denunciation, until thousands came and avowed themselves convinced by his utterances and expectant of a better time.

He was, as I have said, an ascetic, a man who sought not personal pleasure, but who was ready to make any sacrifice so that he might accomplish his purpose and push forward the movement which he had started. Power of that sort is speedily understood by men who are always in quest of personal satisfaction, always themselves looking for individual gratification, so that when they see a man standing out with such conspicuous disinterestedness, such readiness to take the hard things of life when he could get the softer and more pleasant and welcome things, they at once recognise that a man of power is amongst them. John had that, and just now he was at the very zenith of his strength.

And yet, when John is at the very fulness of his power, when the maximum of his energy has been attained and recognised, his great comfort is that somebody stronger than himself is at hand, that there is a mightier One coming after him. He himself is mighty—he is aware of it; it is impossible for him not to know it, the signs are so abundant and so strong; still, his evangel is, “There is One coming after me whose shoe laces I am not worthy to untie—for He will display power far surpassing anything that I have shown.”

Mark seems to have taken that very utterance of the Baptizer’s as the keynote of his Gospel. He not only introduces it and puts it in front of the great picture

that he is to paint, but he takes his cue, if I may so say, from this particular utterance, as to how he shall do his artistic work. The brush is in his hand, the canvases are before him, and one after another, with the utmost vividity and force, he sketches scenes in the life of Jesus Christ at the very beginning of His public ministry which demonstrate that John's prophecy has been fulfilled, that One mightier than the Baptizer has actually come.

I

The strength of Jesus is first shown in His prompt acceptance of the new revolution. He has the power to dedicate Himself to its furtherance; He is prepared to take upon His shoulders the responsibility of taking it from the Baptizer's hand, and pushing it on and on; and He does it with such distinctness and emphasis as to make it clear that He is possessed of greater strength of mind and will than even the Baptizer himself. And His dedication of Himself is accepted by God.

His power is shown too—I can only touch upon these pictures as I pass—in self-mastery. Speedily He is impelled by the Spirit into the desert, and there a wrestling takes place, a fight with Himself, as to what means He shall employ for the accomplishment of this new purpose, the methods by which the revolution which He has accepted from John's lips shall be carried forward. A man's strength is shown quite as much in what he will not do as in what he will do. To be able to say "No" often requires more heroism than it does

to say “Yes.” Mrs. Whitney has written a book in which she tells us of a man who says, “I can’t talk much maybe, but, God helping me, I can hold my tongue, and He knows, I guess, which it takes most of a man to do.” The temptation in the wilderness is the temptation to take swift and short methods towards a millennium. Again and again and again, thrice over, came the temptation to the Christ, and He had power to meet the temptation and to subdue it and subdue Himself.

II

Jesus appears next as a strong Teacher. The summary of His sermon throbs and thrills with energy. You have very little of it; it is a short sermon—at least the summary is short—but you feel how rich, how eloquent it is: “The time is fully come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe this good news.” And as the people listen, here and afterwards, they know the authority with which He speaks. He is a new talker; He differs unspeakably from the customary speakers and preachers and prophets with whom they are familiar; there is something about His note that indicates a new man; He talks with authority. It is not the authority of office, for He has not got any: He does not belong to the scribes, takes no rank amongst the Pharisees—He is an individual without office, save that to which God has appointed Him.

There, as a missionary, as a man who has found a vocation and who is seeking to discharge it, He comes,

and He so speaks that the people are awed, thrilled, lifted off their feet by His utterances. "He speaks as one having authority." It is not the authority of the Church, for He does not recognise the Hebrew Church as having any authority over Him. He has no relation to it. He has come to fulfil its best promise and to realise its highest ideals.

You listen to a man, and you try to analyse his power. You say, How is it this man casts his spell over me? I do not see this and I do not see that, he has not such and such qualities, and yet somehow or other I cannot help listening, and being stirred by what he says. What is it? It is the authority of character. Nothing is so potent in a talker as character; office is nothing compared with the power which a sincere, whole-hearted, dedicated man has. You may have all the Churches behind you with all their authority, and all the Popes from the beginning until now, and yet, if you have no character, you will be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. It is character that Jesus Christ has: the people feel it in His words, they hear it in His tones, and they say, "How strange! What does this mean? Here is a new sort of teaching and a tone of authority." Yes, Jesus Christ is unquestionably mightier than the Baptist. He has in Him, at the centre of Him, such a power of completest surrender to God, and completest union and communion with God, as to make Him one with God; and the people who listen feel the divinity of the speaker, and are compelled to submit themselves as to the voice of the Eternal.

III

The next picture is of Jesus Christ's power as a Leader. John must have felt that very much. He could not have much doubt about His being mightier than himself when all his own disciples had gone off to Him. The individuals that John the Baptizer had captured and made his followers, who had felt the influence of His teaching, these left the Baptist and went over to Jesus Christ, and John had the greatness of soul to say, as he contemplated the exodus of these his chosen, his beloved, as they are bound to their new master, "He must increase, but I must go down and down, and I am glad of it, for the best is going to the top." The magnetism of Jesus Christ as a leader of men was one of the great evidences of His power.

Another picture, and the crowds are ready to crown Him, ready to say of Him, "He is the One we have long been expecting; let us now enthrone Him as our great deliverer," and Jesus Christ gets up in the middle of the night, and says to His disciples, "Let us go away; it is dangerous to stay here. This popularity is not good." He has the power to do that; and so, out from the midst of this invading enthusiasm He goes, and spends the time in communion with His Father and ours.

These are the pictures, shall I say, from the genius of Mark or from the genius of Peter, thrown on to the canvas, showing that a mightier than the Baptist has come, that the "Strong Son of God, immortal love," is

here. But note, what you have in these opening verses is characteristic of the whole of this second Gospel.

Mark's Gospel is the gospel of the strong Son of God, and it is the gospel of a strong man talking about a strong man and strong men. See how he starts. There is no preface, or none worth mentioning. He plunges at once into his story; he does not stand shivering on the brink making preliminary efforts, but goes to the narrative straight away. He gives you none of his own notions, does not put in any of his own reflections, does not halt for a moment to indicate the impression made upon his spirit by Jesus Christ, but tells his tale. He has got facts to narrate, and he narrates them; he has a picture to paint, and he paints it; he has a history to write, and he writes it—and his whole story is of the strong Son of God. His Gospel is full of activity from the first verse to the last. There is movement, and that is the essence of a captivating story. Whenever anybody asks me where they shall begin in reading the New Testament, I always say to them, "Start with Mark." You cannot do better than begin with the strong Son of God. Read what he says concerning the mighty deeds of Jesus Christ, how He went about doing good. Clearly that Gospel is intended to set before us the portrait of a strong worker. There is nothing in it to demonstrate the Messiahship of Jesus in the same way that there is in Matthew. Mark does not give us different types of humanity, and show Jesus Christ in touch with

them, so that we may see the comprehensiveness, the wide range of the sympathies of Jesus, the universalism of the gospel of Jesus, as does Luke. He does not indicate to us, as John does, the relations of the Christ to the Eternal God, and try to locate Him, if I may so say, in the infinite Deity, in the great circle of the Godhead, and fix the place which Jesus Christ occupies there. No: he goes straight on with his tale, and tells us what Jesus Christ did. The whole Gospel is the gospel of Christ in action, of Christ in movement, of Christ's energy as the strong Son of God.

Why is the historicity of Christ of so much importance to us? Wherefore is it necessary for us to go back, as we have been saying the last quarter of a century, back to Jesus Christ? The answer is here, I think: that only by going back to Jesus as He is found in the Gospels can each succeeding generation escape from the tyranny of the last generation's theories of Christ.

How did the artists of three centuries ago paint Jesus? What are the pictures that are most abundant concerning Him? Go into our galleries and look, and you will find the Christ of passive resistance, if I may so say, dominating the entire representation. It is acquiescence in a burden which He will not lift from His shoulders that controls the artistic imagination, and that passes from the brush to the canvas. Everywhere, or nearly everywhere, you have the cross ruling the art of the world. I am not saying that that should not be part of the representation of the Christ of

Palestine—for He died upon the cross, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification—but I do want you to see that it is not the full representation of the ministry of Jesus. That was a strong ministry, a ministry full of grip, rich in its energies. Outflowing, overflowing power characterised that ministry. Mark gives us the true thought of Jesus. From early morning till late at night it is action; action—beneficent, philanthropic, healing ministry; and that is the picture of Jesus that needs to be brought before us, so that we may escape the despotism of preceding generations concerning Christ.

Now the Christ of the ages—what is He? Paul is the first and best witness as to what Christ was as the Christ of the ages, and Paul puts into a phrase the new consciousness that has been created in him and his fellow-Christians by Jesus Christ in the language, “I am equal to all things through Christ who strengthens me, empowers me.” It is the mark of Paul that he is ready for anything. It is said concerning the great Napoleon that his chief characteristic was this, that he always knew what to do next. A great achievement that! Paul always knew what he had to do next. There was only one thing about which he was in a difficulty—he was in a strait betwixt two: whether to wish to go to heaven and enjoy the work there, or to stay here. But so far as staying here was concerned, he always knew what to do next; he was ready for anything, shrank from no difficulty, held back from no duty, faced any temptation, through Christ who

strengthened him. And in that particular he is typical of the entire community.

Paul is the primitive Christian community incarnate, embodied; and that Christian primitive community is the manifestation of the invincible strength of Jesus. Is there anything that more distinctively marks out that early Christian community than its insuppressible power, its advancing and growing strength? There you see it going on from point to point, from vantage to vantage, always with resources not exhausted. It is the strength which God supplies through His beloved Son that finds manifestation through this primitive Christian community.

There is only one question, then, that I need ask, and it is this: Suppose you ask some Mark to write your gospel. Let us imagine him at it—what would he put down? “A weakling who never knew his own mind, could not find his own way, would not take up burdens, and never carried any responsibilities if he could shirk them”? Is that the gospel of a Christian? Ought it not to be this rather, that Mark, writing your gospel, has to put down: “A mightier than the man who had gone before him is here; one who inherits the strength of the past, and who reincarnates it, and gives it a fuller expression in his life”? What is the use of coming after preceding generations if you cannot better them? “Ye are the epistles of Christ, read and known of all men.” Whosoever will may read your gospel, your epistle; it is there. Men see it, and they take their notions of what the gospel of Christ is

from what we are ; and if we are cowards—if we cannot bear burdens for the sake of securing triumphs for righteous causes, if we will not work so as to make room in the earth for the great ideas of God, and suffer and fight, speak or be still, to get them established—then verily we are not strong sons of God. Ours it is to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might ; to be strengthened, as Paul advises the Christians at Ephesus, in the inner man, at the centre of our being. That privilege is ours ; and where we are forced to confess our weakness, let us welcome the evangel of Isaiah : “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; they shall walk, and not faint.” It is waiting on the Lord that opens the way for the descent of power from on high. The winds rush into a vacuum. Yes, and when a man is waiting upon God, it is as if he said, “I am here, I am listening, I am hoping, I am trusting.” And as surely as we listen and wait and trust, the power from on high will come ; nothing can keep it back. We shall be strong in God. In the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength.

Strong Son of God, Immortal Love, make us worthy of brotherhood with Thee. Amen.

XI

THE SEVERITY OF JESUS

“Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”—*MATT. xvi. 13, 14.*

HAD I not found, I could not have believed that the Gospels contained so much evidence of the severity of Jesus as they do. I am surprised at the space that evidence occupies in the records. Portraits of the gentle and loving Saviour are so familiar, and the thought of His beautiful meekness, unwearied patience, and persistent forgivingness is so dominant, that it seems almost unwarrantable to suggest that sternness was one of His characteristics.

And yet the sternness of Jesus not only lies on the face of our records, but shines there so brilliantly as to form one of their distinctive features. It is in John as it is in Mark, and in Luke as well as Matthew; nor does it fail to find reproduction in the letters and Acts of the Apostles and in the Book of Revelation.

It is apparent from the conjectures of the people as to “who Jesus was” that the impression He had made upon His contemporaries was one of austerity, of

Divine severity, or it would not have occurred to them that He was John the Baptist, who had so recently stirred the whole land with his vehement denunciations and powerful appeals; or else Elijah, that sternest prophet of the olden time, who came down like a thunderbolt on the priests of Baal and the house of Ahab and Jezebel; or Jeremiah, that fearless herald of doom, ready to dare the prison and the grave in loyalty to his convictions. There can be no doubt about the popular judgment. The Christ of Palestine was capable of impetuous energy, of passionate wrath against wrong, of relentless pugnacity, of pitiless exposure of the iniquities of men in high places, and of invincible daring on behalf of right.

In His words to the men who sought to be His disciples you catch a tone of severity. He is accosted on the road by a learned Pharisee, a doctor of the law, a teacher and preacher, who says, with the air of one conferring a favour and making a sacrifice of himself for the sake of the Nazarene peasant, "Teacher, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." At once Jesus turns upon this aspirant for great things for himself, and says, "Think what you are doing! Remember 'the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' Do you not see that you are choosing hardship, privation, crucifixion? Are you ready for all that?"

Whether that young man went away sorrowing or not, it cannot be doubted that he must have felt the sternness of that advice.

It is still more manifest in another case. Philip—timid, diffident, eager to come to Christ and yet afraid to commit himself to the responsibilities of belonging to a new school in religion—says, “I will come”; and then, talking in the Eastern fashion, he says, “but let me go home and look after my father to the day of his burial first.” “Not at all,” says Jesus. “Away with your pretext for delay. Your father has not a prior claim. Put first what is first: follow Me.”

And again you find the same insistence upon an immediate decision when the request is to go and say good-bye to friends at home. “No, no!” Jesus says. “Come at once. Delays are dangerous. No one having put his hand upon the plough and looking backward is well set for the kingdom of God. No reservations are allowed. Half-heartedness is a disqualification for the highest service. Dallying with conviction is fatal to character.”

A still more striking example is given in His treatment of Nicodemus. At once Jesus meets the Rabbi's studied courtesy with a personal appeal, and his request for evidence of His Messiahhood with the declaration that, Jew though he is and one of the chosen, learned as he is and professedly religious, yet he must change his point of view, look at himself and at life from an entirely different angle of vision, and be “regenerated,” born from above, if he is to enter into the kingdom of God of which he is thinking and talking. That “new birth” was a revolting idea to a Pharisee. It cut clean across his habitual ideas. To

him it seemed impossible. But Jesus returned to the attack, repeated His demand, and told him to cease wondering about the process, and remember that as the wind blows where it lists, and men know nothing about whence it comes or whither it goes, so it is with the ways of the Spirit of God. The man still resented the doctrine. But did Jesus relent? No. He said, "What! you, a master in Israel, and you do not see this?" It was a bewildering message, and by no means a comforting one. But men need to be shaken out of their delusions by direct speech and searching appeal.

No one has questioned that the expulsion of the traders from the temple court wears an aspect of severity. It is a passionate protest against the degeneracy of the time. The gross and corrupting materialism of the day had penetrated the inmost recesses of the spiritual life. The priests were so oblivious of the claims of God and of the soul that they converted the sacrifices of the poor and the rich into occasions for increasing their gains. They were the Tetzels of their day, and Jesus was the Luther who exposed their disgraceful tricks and condemned their plunderings and that of their allies, the money-changers.

His unceasing war with the Pharisees breaks out on the occasion when Levi invites his old associates in the tax-collecting business to the feast in his own house, so that they may meet his new Master. Those insatiable critics of the strange Teacher, the Pharisees,

had stolen in to see how He would treat the "disreputable" guests, and they felt themselves scandalised when they saw that He was "one of them," "eating and drinking" with them as though there were no differences between them. And, eager to expose Him, they flung a sneer at His disciples under their breath; but He caught the cowardly insinuation, and with indignation and scornful satire He said: "Healthy people like you, of course, do not want a doctor. The doctor goes to the sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners! You faultless souls, you need no healer. Saintly men, who would think of suggesting that you are not spotlessly righteous?" And then, with scathing irony, He says: "Get you to your books that you prize so much. Go and seek out again the meaning of the words of one of your prophets, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'"—thus directly charging them with ignorance of the very book they idolised, and flinging back their supercilious criticisms in their teeth.

But that stern handling of the teachers and preachers of the Jewish religion distinctly reveals the motives of the severity of our Lord. It is, in fact, characteristic of His ministry. His severity was shown almost exclusively towards the professional and recognised leaders of the religious life of Palestine for grossly corrupting the institutions and agencies of religion, and converting the Jewish Church into an engine of intolerance, contempt of men, social divisiveness, and national ruin. Three-fourths of our records are

devoted to the exposure of the hollowness of the phrases and forms of Pharisaic piety, of the covetousness and self-seeking of the aristocratic Sadducees, and of the blinding casuistry and gross distortion of the law and the prophets by the teaching of the scribes. With unrelenting persistence Jesus denounced their unreality, hypocrisy, and duplicity.

Look at this scene as an example. The Master is going through a corn-field with His disciples. The grain is ripe and waiting for the sickle, and the disciples are hungry; and so, as they go, they pluck the full ears and rub them in their hands, and eat the wheat.

But it is the Sabbath, and the persecuting Pharisees are on the watch, and at once seize the opportunity of condemning Him and them. "Do you not see," say they, "what your followers are doing? They snatch the ears of corn, and that is reaping; they rub out the grain, and that is threshing; and the law says reaping and threshing are not to be done on the Sabbath."

How does Jesus meet that sophistry? Is it with a gentle expostulation? Hardly! Is it with a new interpretation? Not exactly! No! He turns and sternly faces them, and tells them to go to their book again. "Recall," He says, "your favourite hero, David. See him as he enters the sacred shrine and satisfies his hunger with the dedicated loaves! Get down to principles. Cease living in bondage to petty details. Breathe the bracing air of reality and truth. Use your judgment and sense, and cease your peddling casuistry. Principle is all in all. The motive makes the man."

Still more impressive is the great indictment of the Pharisees uttered towards the close of His ministry. One can scarcely read its successive scathing sentences without a gathering awe. It is one of the most terrible condemnations that ever fell on the ears of men. Eight times breaks out the "Woe, woe"; and though it is an exclamation of commiseration as well as of denunciation, yet the accumulated force of the recurring words of doom, backed in each case by the description of some special sin, gives it a unique place amongst the witnesses to the severity of the Son of Man. It has not, so far as I know, ever been surpassed in the whole history of invective.

The same condemnation, but with an increased solemnity, is heard when the Pharisees explain His works of mercy and grace by charging Him with being in league with the devil, and attribute the healing of the man blind, dumb, and lunatic to Satan. A few sharp and severe sentences dispose of that charge. "Is it likely," He asks, with quivering indignation and scorn, "that Satan would work against Satan?" And then He rebukes these critics for refusing to see the truth; tells them they are sinning against the light and against the Spirit of God, the source of light, and thereby searing their consciences and inviting an awful and an inevitable doom.

The same severity is seen in His treatment of covetousness. It is, in the judgment of Christ, one of the most hateful and destructive vices. It strikes at the

heart of our social well-being, "defiles" the man from whose spirit it proceeds, and destroys the society in which it has free play. It leads the farmer to pull down his barns and build greater, though he will never see what is put in them, but will be summoned to render his account at the bar of God. It sends Dives to the place of unallayed torment, says Jesus, in His picture of the penalty that follows the misuse of wealth. It is surely this same keen perception of the way in which covetousness breaks up the family peace and destroys brotherhood that constrains Him to refuse compliance with the wish of the man who starts up with the request that He should speak to his brother and urge him to divide his inheritance with him. To Jesus Christ covetousness, wherever met,—in the Church, or market, or home,—is the sure sign of a life separated from God and goodness.

Nor can we fail to see that this serious interpretation of life and its grave issues is the key to the explanation of some of the parables of our Lord, and specially of those given as "His hour" of final sacrifice was drawing close to hand. Challenged by the Jewish rulers as to His authority for teaching, He gives them a question they cannot answer, and then follows it with a parable. "A man," He says, "had two sons. He came to the first and he said, Son, go work in my vineyard." "Yes," said the son, but did not go. The second son received the same direction, and promptly said he would not go, but afterwards changed his mind and went. Then came the question: "Whether of the

two did the father's will?" The answer was clear. The listeners were in a cleft stick. They could not avoid condemning themselves. They did. And did He let them off at that? No! At once He drove the truth home and said: "Verily I tell you that the despised tax-gatherers and harlots are going into the kingdom before you."

Severity of a similar kind marks the advice He gives to His apostles, and to the Seventy when they are sent forth. They are to be ready for insults, and submit to them without reprisals; to be smitten on the face, to allow illegal spoliation, extortion, and tyranny, and not retaliate. More stern and exacting demands were never laid on men than Christ laid on those who were willing to take up His cross and carry forward His work.

But the time fails me to tell all, or even to hint at, the wealth of this kind of material in our Gospels. I do not forget the other side. I spoke last Sunday of His magnanimity and sweet reasonableness, of His pity for the penitent, of His tender consideration for the unfortunate, of His charm for the outcast, and of His overflowing love and patience and grace for His disciples. Forget it? No, we rejoice in it; but we cannot be faithful to our Gospels and ignore His sternness. Ah, my friends, did we but know our God as He appears in these Gospels, what dread of His censure, what fear of corrupting His religion, what holy awe of His presence, would take possession of us, and how eagerly we should pray that He would

search us and try us, and lead us in His way and to the full possession of His Spirit!

But is this sternness seen in the Christ of the early Church? Do we find the same severity in the Lord of the ages as in the Christ of Palestine? Is the same portrait of Jesus in the Acts and the Apocalypse, and in the writings of Peter and Paul?

Listen to John's description of his vision of the glorified Redeemer: "With eyes like a flame of fire," and a "voice resembling the sound of many waters," "from whose mouth goes forth a two-edged sword," "whose glance resembled the sun when shining in its full strength," and you will not be surprised that John fell at His feet as one dead. Verily that is no dream! It is the Christ John had seen in the days of His flesh, the strong Son of God, severe, stern, authoritative, smiting evil without mercy, and flaming out with resistless indignation against iniquity practised in the name of religion.

The same hatred of evil in the Nicolaitans of Ephesus and in those who clung to the teaching of Balaam in Pergamos; the same searching of men's inmost thoughts in Thyatira and the repudiation of the deadly moderation of the Church at Laodicæa, appears in the letters of the Lord to the Churches as in the speeches of Jesus to the Pharisees, scribes, and hypocrites. Can any doubt that we have an echo of the Christ of the Gospels in the withering words addressed to the Laodicæans: "You say, I am rich, and have wealth stored up, and I stand in need of

nothing: and you do not know that if there is a wretched creature it is *you*—pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Does not the stern contempt with which Peter says of Simon Magus, “Thy money perish with thee,” remind us of the attitude of Christ towards the covetousness of the priests? And do we not trace the spirit of our Lord in the severe denunciations levelled by Paul against the flagrant offenders of the Church at Corinth?

Clearly, this severity of Jesus does not represent a fleeting mood, a passing breeze of indignation, but a fixed element in the nature of Him who is Son of God and Son of man.

And if we look at human life on the one hand and Divine life on the other, we shall see it is exactly what we ought to have expected.

For it is a false view of life that treats it as though it were always afternoon, bright and sunny, and had no gloom-filled nights. We know better. Science has told us that nature is infinitely pitiless; that it has no message of forgiveness; that law is inexorable, and the full penalty for its violation must always be borne to the end. And experience tells us of terrible agony as well as of exulting joy. Vast breadths of human progress have been secured by flaming indignation against wrong—swift and unexpected outflashings of the outraged consciences of men. There are moments when human nature seems to have lost its capacity for indignation against wrong. But it is there. It

is an elemental quality. It is a mark of the divinity that sleeps in us; and when roused it arises in fury and sweeps everything before it. Carlyle has described the upleap of the fierce fires of Puritanism burning up the refuse of the wrongs of ages, and making a clear course for a new and better England. That Puritanism is eternal.

And now turn from our life to the God of our life, and behold what—"the goodness of God"? Yes, but also the "severity." See not only the loving kindness and the tender mercy, but also the righteousness of God. He is glorious in holiness, and bids men let "justice roll down as waters and righteousness as an overflowing stream." We too often forget His invincible hatred of evil, and that "there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared," revered, and obeyed, and so become flaccid, molluscous creatures, incapable of great hate against wrong, lock-lipped in the presence of the corruptions of religion, and Laodicean in temper and life.

There is a capacity for indignation in man; the stern and severe are in life. God is just, and will not suffer iniquity to triumph; and therefore Jesus, who is the human and the Divine in one, the express image of the essence of God and the equally express image of the possibilities of man, is the picture and the explanation of the sternness of God and of human life. From Him we may know its use, its righteous motive, its limitations, and its place in the character of the thoroughly good man.

On that I can only say that we need more of severity in the life of to-day. Our religion is effeminate. It lacks grit, firmness, tenacity, indignation. It is emotional and often sickly. It is afraid of the open, and delights to be coddled. It shrinks from the fresh air of facts and the struggle with evil. It prefers to be soothed rather than to fight, and it walks arm in arm with the Pharisees, scribes, and hypocrites, and goes to dine with them instead of telling them of the danger they are inviting to their country. Professor Huxley said he had great difficulty in deciding which aspect of Christ he should accept as the true one—the gentle Shepherd of the Catacombs, or the stern Judge of the Roman altars. Modern Christianity has decided in favour of the portrait of the gentle Shepherd, to the exclusion of the stern Judge; but it is a defect, and must work disastrously. Both portraits are true—true of the Gospels, true of the whole of the New Testament, true of our human life, and true of God.

May He who has left us His example that we should walk in His steps make us partakers of His whole nature, and thereby fit us for all the work He seeks at our hands!

XII

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

“Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases.”—MATT. viii. 17.

JESUS CHRIST was “a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” By that He entered into the deepest and most characteristic experiences of men, identified Himself with suffering humanity, accepted the worst conditions under which our life has to be lived, and thereby gave proof that “the Word was made flesh.”

It has been said, and it is still believed by many, that suffering enters into the structure and plan of the universe. Paul held that idea, and in his eighth chapter to the Romans made express mention of it. It seemed to him that the whole creation groans and travails together in pain. John Stuart Mill accepted the same conception of nature, and to him it brought difficulty in the interpretation of God and of His works, since it seemed as though cruelty was a part of the plan of God. Mr. E. Kay Robinson, in a book entitled *Religion and Nature*, controverts that position, and

endeavours to supply evidence establishing the proposition that animals have no suffering; that they know nothing of pain or anguish or torture; that these experiences are possible only to individuals who think; and that, consequently, the pains that we attribute to the animal world are due to our anthropomorphic methods of reflection, rather than to actual fact.

But, whatever may be said concerning the part of the animal creation outside ourselves, suffering is a most real element in our experience. Whilst I believe that the credit balance is on the side of happiness for every one of us, yet I am certain that we have to spend much of our life in the shade rather than in the sunshine, and that suffering dogs our steps from the cradle to the grave. We may escape for a year and a day, but by and by we shall be seized, and shall know that suffering enters very largely into our human life. Not far away from the theatre, where men go for pleasure, is the hospital—the palace of pain. Though in this street there is a factory, in a neighbouring street you must have the infirmary, where the wounded soldiers of industry may be refitted for their task. Life for some of us is a succession of pains, for others it is to a very large extent free; but the element of suffering is one of the realities of our everyday existence. Charlotte Brontë says: “Sorrow is the mistress of the largest school in the world, and with her wand of authority she summons us all to her feet.” But she does not march all her pupils into the market-

place and exhibit them to the eyes of the world. No! Many of her much-enduring pupils, those who have to learn the hardest lessons, are to be found in the hidden nooks of life, away from the crowd, unobserved of men. For, besides the suffering in the hospital, there is the suffering which the hospital never sees. The worst things that we have to endure are not the things that affect the nerves, but the things that affect the soul. The greatest pains to which we are subjected are those that come from the broken heart—blighted faith, wounded love, defeated purpose, the labour of years blasted in a moment and destroyed; a mother's heart wrung in agony for a child on whom she has spent her affection, her love, her everything. These are the pains and sufferings we have to endure, and a Christ who never touched them would not be a Christ for humanity.

We do well to remember that Jesus was the "strong Son of God, immortal love." We do well to think of Him as "the happy Christ." He is, He was; but we should be false to our records if we did not also think of Him as "a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief"—as, in fact, the chief sufferer in His day in the land of Palestine. The Christian centuries may have shut out of sight some of the other aspects of the character of Jesus Christ by painting Him so constantly as the sufferer as to make us unaware of the deep founts of gladness for ever welling up in His spirit. Nevertheless, the symbol of the Cross is a true one, it is in accord with facts, and we must think

of Jesus to-day as He is represented in our records, as the suffering Redeemer, and as the Healer of men through His sufferings; by the way in which He bears them, and thus shows how sufferings can be turned to the best issues for the individual and the world.

Never, surely, was there one upon this earth who could take to himself with so much appropriateness and truth the words with which Israel speaks of itself in the day of its dejection and desolation: "Behold all ye that pass by, Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Israel's accumulated woes in the days of its captivity are summed up in that one life, the life of Jesus Christ, so that He, with the utmost appropriateness and with absolute accuracy, can employ this language about Himself. There is, in the inwardness of His sufferings, in the anguish and torture to which He is subjected by various forces and causes, in the complete vicariousness of all He endures for men, that which makes Jesus Christ the unique Sufferer; and, whilst putting Him in a place alongside humanity, still leaves Him occupying a place alone and apart.

Think of the life into which He was born. As we should say in these days, He comes "of humble but respectable parents." His birth is in a stable; His first cradle is a manger, and none of the fairies seem to be hovering about Him when He enters life. Men from the East, the magi, come with their gifts and worship; but the things that make life easy, that multiply its comforts, that relieve it of burdens—these things are

not brought to the baby or to the baby's parents. No! Whilst He is still a child, He has to be carried away into Egypt, in order to escape the jealousy, strong and wild, of Herod the king. As He passes through His boyhood and into His young manhood, He has to face the uncertainties of a working man's life, the chances and perils of industry. So Jesus, in the external conditions of His life, enters into the lowliest lot, links Himself with the possibilities of hardship in the carpenter's experience, and thereby becomes one with the whole mass of suffering, indescribable in the centuries past, and still immense and indescribable.

And if you look on Him as a Worker for the spiritual welfare of the world, you find that His career as a minister of truth is one of suffering from beginning to end. He suffers for liberty, for righteousness, for a broad outlook upon life, for truth, for justice. There is no great cause, in fact, that is dear to the sons of men for which He does not suffer. Scarcely has His ministry started before its revolutionary character is discovered. His fellow-citizens at Nazareth say that He is not patriotic according to the narrow and blind patriotism of that city, because He believes in a God who cares for men as men, and sends His blessings to Naaman the Syrian as well as to Elisha the prophet. And if you read the brief accounts given to us of what He had to face, you will see that He is never beyond the reach of suffering. He is pursued day by day with the utmost malignancy. The men, in fact, who ought to have been most eager to listen to what He had to

say, and learn from Him, were those who spoke of Him as a "blasphemer": attributed the use of His energies for the healing of men to the presence of "the prince of devils" within Him! They misconceived Him, misrepresented Him, hated Him, pursued Him, waxed vehement (says one of the writers) against Him, and tried in every possible way to entangle Him in His talk, so that they might hurry Him to death. His ministry is a ministry of suffering. Whatever pleasure comes to Him in it is derivable from the consciousness of loyalty to conviction, fidelity to righteousness, unswerving adherence to what He feels to be right, and the assurance that He is "pleasing His Father." Scarcely any pleasure comes to Him from those on whose behalf He works, except from the little band close to Him, who are sympathetic with Him, and are ready to heed His advice and risk their all in love of Him.

He has also to suffer what, perhaps, may be described as that still more painful suffering which comes through the attachment of people to Him. He is the cause of suffering to others, the means by which His own intimates, His dearest friends, are subjected to pain. He has to tell them that if they attach themselves to Him they will be hated, even as He has been hated. Men will persecute them, and will say that they are doing God service in persecuting them. And when He Himself is seized, you get a glimpse of the agony of His spirit as He turns to the men who have captured Him and says, "Let these go their way." Do not

seize them as well ; take Me, as you must, but do not take them, My own disciples ! I think that one of the most bitter ingredients in the cup of Jesus Christ must have been this, that anybody who attached himself to Him had to pay so heavy a price for that attachment ; that if they took upon themselves His name, they must be prepared to be hated, persecuted, cast out, and trodden under foot of men. A man may suffer bravely, courageously, when he can tie up all the suffering to himself ; but when it comes to wife, child, friend, associate, then it is that his very heartstrings are broken and he feels overwhelmed by the pressure of his afflictions.

And if you go still further into the heart of Christ and try to trace His suffering, you will see that He must have suffered most acutely from temptation. We talk of "*The Temptation*": we take one great fight and isolate it from the rest of His life, and are tempted to think that Jesus Christ suffered little temptation besides that ; and that that one victory was all he won. We do well to remember that great temptation, because it comes at the very beginning of His career, immediately after His dedication of Himself to His ministry ; but to think of it as if it were the only temptation He had is to make a very serious mistake. "Christ was tempted," says the writer, "in all points like as we are": tempted to sin, tempted in regard to fretfulness and impatience and pride and spiritual fatigue. Take His life in its full range and you see how His life as a whole is a life of temptation, and

that only eternal vigilance, perpetual resistance to the tempting forces within and around Him, kept His character sweet and pure, and His life healthy and helpful.

He must, too, have suffered, must He not, from having to deal with the gross faults of good men? If anything tries one's patience this does: to discover exceedingly good people, individuals with high ideals and of real consecration, so blinded and prejudiced as to take a course that is disastrous for everything that is really good, and to set themselves in antagonism to one who is seeking that good and nothing else, and seeking it at great cost. Remember that Jesus was uniquely holy, and the purer a man is the greater is his sensitiveness to what is wrong; it hurts him more. Some men are not at all touched by the impurity that rages through our streets; but to a spirit that is restrained and fleckless, to one who has checked the impure thought as soon as it has come and blocked the way of its access to the soul—to him the seething impurity of a great city is a burden he can never lift from his heart. When you have to come face to face with the men who should be warriors against impurity as Jesus Christ had, and find that they are feeding it, you may enter somewhat into the agony which He felt when He bore in His own body the sins of the world. He carried on His own great sympathetic heart the aggravated iniquities of mankind, and went to His cross through the garden of Gethsemane, pushed and goaded there by the vices of good men. He

suffered the contradiction of saints, of all the reputed "saints," against Himself.

Dear friends, let us try to think of it. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The Incarnation was not taking on a body just as I may put on a coat. It was the entrance of the Word into the whole of our life, and especially into that element of suffering and of struggle which is its dominating characteristic. Unless we see that phase of the Incarnation we miss its pre-eminent meaning, we fail to lay hold of its inmost reality. "He Himself," says the evangelist, "took our infirmities and bore our diseases." The special aspect which appeals to this evangelist is the way in which Jesus takes upon Himself the diseases and burdens of physical affliction borne by the people. Sympathy is exhausting. Power goes out of Christ as He heals. But the evangelist's interpretation must be extended along the lines which I have pointed out.

But, brothers, if that were all, if we had to stay at the fact that Jesus was a unique sufferer, it would be a poor story for us. The charm of the record is this, that the suffering Jesus is the interpreter of the true function, the real place and service of suffering in our human life. He is the one who shows us what we are to do with suffering and what great aid it may render in the progress of the human race. Jesus is always master of Himself in His sufferings. He never loses His balance. To use one of His own phrases, He "wins His life" by His patience, by the steadiness and

thoroughness with which He retains His mental and spiritual power; so that every suffering contributes, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, to His character. He learns obedience by the things which He suffers. The Captain of our salvation becomes perfect through His sufferings. It is a great contribution this writer has made to the interpretation of the sufferings of Jesus in showing us their work in making Him the man He was. The suffering was brief, but it worked out, as the Apostle Paul says, "an eternal weight of glory" in His character, just as the intensely hot fires work off the dross from the metal and let it flow out in its purity; or as a lapidary engaged on his machine with a diamond works off the refuse and lets the facets come forth in all their freedom, so that they reflect the light of the heavens. Although the sufferings of Jesus were as a fierce fire for Him, He came out stainless. He did no sin: though He suffered so much, He did no sin; though He was tempted so severely, He did no sin; though His ministry was one in which He was face to face with some of the most malignant persecutors that it was possible for a man to face, He did no sin. That is the meaning of suffering for the individual, that is the function which it has to discharge in the life of the world: it must minister to purity. Paul says it is part and parcel of the structure of the universe, but it has power to make men of us, men after the pattern of manhood in Christ Jesus, pure men, victorious men, tender-hearted, forgiving, loving men; and we fail to

use properly the pains and sufferings of life, whether physical, mental, or spiritual, unless they are made contributory to the fashioning of our character according to the pattern of Jesus Christ.

But this is only one side. The suffering of Jesus becomes the instrument by means of which He saves the world. "I, if I be lifted up,"—if the tragedy of the cross is faced, if the suffering life is carried out to the last degree,—will draw all men unto Me. And Carlyle and thousands more bear their testimony that the Man of Sorrows has been and is the supreme magnet of the gospel. It is not the happiness of the Christ that has been the attraction; men have sought that elsewhere. It is the Man of Sorrows who has cast His spell over the heart of the world, drawn it to Himself, and given it patience and hope, fortitude and heroism.

Without suffering the world stagnates. It is a painful thing to have to say, but it is true. We fight for a great cause, and we win; but scarcely have we won than we slacken our zeal, abate our endeavour, become fatigued, less vigilant, and the devil gets to work again. We tire in our tasks, we become apathetic, and around us spring the evils once more, perhaps in greater force than ever. We fight for purity as we did nineteen years ago in this metropolis; a great spasm of indignation and pity seizes us, and we awake, determined to cleanse our streets. After five years of fighting we fall back, and now again the cry is being heard that we are being destroyed by the

impurities of our metropolis; and to us from a neighbourhood not far away comes the revelation telling of the sort of impurity that is sapping the manhood of our land. We fight for education; we want to take it out of the hands of the bigot and put it into the hands of the citizen. We win. After having won, for a time we slacken our zeal, and the bigot takes advantage of our limpness, and on he goes, making things worse than they were before; and the evil grows up round about us so painfully that we wake again and fight once more. It is human experience; as George Eliot says, "Men are not able to keep the heights the soul is competent to gain." We gain them, and then slip down, and in the vale find ourselves oppressed by a fresh access of pain and anguish; then a new impulse comes to us from the suffering, and we start up the hill again, and get once more to the heights on which we were. So Jesus Christ used the evil of the world, and gave in that first century an impact to pity and compassion, tenderness and wide-reaching sympathy, which lasted at least for a century and a half, and was followed by a tremendous enthusiasm in the distribution of property, which rearranged social conditions inside the new society, and went far to cleanse the old Roman world of much of the evil that was in it. By the third century, that Church itself had become the victim of the evils of the Pagan Empire, and we have had, century after century, uprisings against the recrudescence of the evils of the Church and the world.

The Christ of Palestine was the chief sufferer in His day in Palestine, and He has been the one and only Saviour, the "Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world" throughout all the generations.

The sufferers have been the saviours and the comforters of mankind. Do not, then, I beseech you, indulge in complaining because you are called to a great fight of affliction, but hold on, be faithful, learn obedience by the things that you suffer, save yourself from repining, heroically and manfully bear all and use all, so that you may grow up into the fulness of the stature of Jesus Christ, and continue His saving ministry to the world.

The Christ of Palestine is the Lord of the ages. He is still the strength of the sufferer. Many a one has said—I have heard it: "My Lord suffered this for me. He died on the cross for me. He bore all that tragic hour in Gethsemane for me. He died on Calvary for my salvation. Cannot I bear this? I will." The thought of what Jesus bore has been an inexhaustible fountain of courage and of heroism for the suffering men and women of this earth. From that day to this Jesus has been feeding the patience, the heroism, the fortitude of the sons and daughters of affliction, and they have been enabled to say, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, if it be Thy will, I will drink it up." The genealogy of all fruitful suffering is to be traced right back to Gethsemane and Calvary. In the actual world—the painful kingdom of time and place—dwell care and canker and fear. With the thought "of Christ

and of His ideal life" has been, and is, "immortal hilarity, the rose of joy."

And once more, does not the Lord of the ages still stir the souls of men to pity the sufferer? Is it not from Him that there has come this new tenderness, this compassion towards the woebegone round about us? The genesis of the hospital is in the heart of Jesus. "Seeing the multitude, He was moved with compassion." Jesus lives; His Spirit is in the heart and life of men. His disciples breathe the same out-flowing tenderness and helpfulness. Our hospitals to-day are witnesses to His presence and power in the earth, and they are voices at once testifying to Him as living, and summoning us to carry forward and complete His work.

Let us therefore, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, give this day towards this good work in our city, for the sake of our suffering brothers and sisters, and for the sake of the Man of Sorrows, who took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses. Amen.

XIII

“A MAN FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST”

Barnabas “was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost.”—
ACTS xi. 24.

THAT seems a bold claim to make for a man of like passions with ourselves; and yet the historian makes it quite easily, as a matter of course, and, indeed, as though it contained nothing extraordinary. Barnabas is described as “a man full of the Holy Ghost” in the same sentence and with the same direct simplicity and inevitableness that tells of his goodness of heart, his wide sympathies, his freedom from suspicion, and his courageous trustfulness of soul. The great affirmation is made as though there is nothing exceptional in it. It is, in truth, the simple fact. It explains the whole man, in the soul of him; accounts for all that he is and all that he does: for his fine generousities, his unselfish use of his possessions, his skill as an envoy from the anxious Church at Jerusalem to the new and venturesome society of believers at Antioch, and for his designation by his brethren, along with Saul of Tarsus, to the preaching of the gospel in the fields beyond. Barnabas “is a

man full of the Holy Ghost." That goes to the root of the matter. That gives the man's picture at a stroke.

But then, Barnabas belongs to a community made up of men and women "filled with the Holy Ghost," and therefore it is as natural for a man writing the annals of early Christianity to speak of him in this way as for a botanist to talk of the fragrance of the lily, or of the beauty of the rose, or of the strength of the oak. The one distinctive mark of the new Christian society is the presence and power of the Spirit of God—not in fleeting and transient manifestation, but in abiding and overflowing fulness. The new Churchman is everywhere known by this access of power, by this enlargement of soul, by this irrepressible and Divine vitality. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." It is the springtide of the spiritual life of the world, the beginning of a new epoch in the spiritual development of mankind. The Hebrew Church, "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null; dead perfection, no more," is displaced by a community whose courage and patience, charity and self-sacrifice, light and heat, are the wonder and perplexity of the defenders of the ancient forms of faith, and the proof of a marvellous uplift of the spiritual life of man. Pentecost has fully come. The praying host is filled with the Spirit of God, speaks and acts with a heroism and abandon, and lives with a purity and a benevolence that attest a complete victory over selfishness and convention, and

a full surrender to the inspirations of Heaven; and when later on their work arouses the opposition of the ecclesiastical authorities of Jerusalem, and they are ordered to cease speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus, they meet together and pray, and again it comes to pass that they are "one and all filled with the Holy Ghost," and proceed to tell the good news of the gospel to their fellow-citizens with all boldness. Therefore, Luke, in supplying this portraiture of Barnabas, is only telling us that he shares in this supreme qualification for service of the Christian society, for he, like them, is filled with the Holy Ghost.

Now, I think I can scarcely find better aid in our Whitsunday study of that deepest mystery of human life, the work of the Spirit of God in and through the soul of man, than in this concrete and authentic example; for Barnabas is in no way out of the common. He is not ordained to the apostolate by the special call of Jesus, as was Peter; he is not endowed with the splendid gifts of Paul; and though he is a "good man," yet his goodness is not of such transcendent character as to lift him far beyond his compeers. He is, in short, an everyday Christian, telling us in his life that "what one is the millions may be." Renan says: "Christianity has been guilty of some injustice to this great man in not placing him in the front rank amongst its founders." I do not think so. Great and useful as he was, he had his weaknesses, and his inconspicuousness is our gain, and his achievements

with his limitations our inspiration. The lowliest of us may expect to take our place amongst the builders of the Church of Christ, and by the side of the messengers of the gospel of the grace of God, since the founts of force from which he drew are as freely open to us as they were to him.

It is a solid gain to study any doctrine in a human life, and especially the doctrine of the Holy Ghost in a life like his. Jesus spoke of the Spirit as "power from on high"; but how shall we identify it amongst the contradictory and confused forces of our life? How shall we detect its advent, trace out its qualities, and make sure of its effects? Here in Barnabas is an answer, for here we see the force at work towards certain definite and indisputable results; and exactly as we may know the invisible forces of electricity by the messages which reach us from a distant city, or the sounds which convey ideas to us from a distant friend, or the movement that carries us to our journey's end, so from the effects laid bare in this man's life may we know the power of God in men.

Again, Jesus told His disciples that on His departure the Comforter would come, "even the Spirit of truth," and lead them into all the truth, to the sphere the truth fills. Now here is a man who starts in quest of the truth, and finds it; sees facts exactly as they are, and in their true relations and values, and acts upon his discovery. Once more our Lord spoke of the Spirit as "the Comforter," the Paraclete, who would take His place as the guardian and leader, the solace

and strength, of His followers; and it is not too much to say that the whole career of Barnabas, after his surrender to the Saviour, is a convincing proof of the fulfilment of that exceeding great and precious promise. And, indeed, his career was interpreted in this way by his comrades; for instead of calling him by the name of Joseph, the name he received from his parents, they described him as Barnabas, which is by interpretation "son of encouragement," "son of exhortation and comfort"—for to them that was the real meaning of his gracious ministry, the purport and issue of his new life. He was "a man full of the Holy Ghost."

Now, to seek the meaning of a doctrine in a human fact is the capital principle of the Incarnation. God was in Christ, so that He might be known and understood, trusted and loved, of men—understood as the Father of men, loving them and seeking their salvation; redeeming them by the gift of His Son, and welcoming their penitence and faith; but known also as the Spirit, cleansing them from all unrighteousness, renewing their life at its springs, working in them to will the right and the just, and to do what is right and just; and therefore "the man Christ Jesus," who is the mediator between the whole God and the whole man, is the way to the Spirit, to the knowledge and possession of the Spirit, as well as to the Father. For "the Spirit was given to Him without measure," without any limitations, and, therefore, the primary sources of our information concerning the Spirit of God in us are in His con-

sciousness and experiences, in His teachings and life as they appear in the Gospels. In this, as for the whole spiritual realm, in ideas and in power, He is the *alpha* and *omega*, the first and the last.

But next to Him, and aiding us in comprehending His teaching concerning the Spirit, we may place this "case" of Barnabas; for though it will not help us to determine the relations of the Holy Ghost to the Godhead, or to form faultless definitions and coherent theories of the work of the Spirit, it yields this practical teaching, that "a man full of the Holy Ghost" (1) *is supremely spiritual in his interpretation and use of life*; (2) *is intensely sympathetic with spiritual progress*; and (3) *courageously leads in the spiritual service of mankind*.

1. The chief gain of the presence of the Spirit I gather from this sketch of Barnabas is in what men call the intellect. It is spiritualised. There is a complete uplift of the thinking and observing man to the highest planes of thought and vision. Barnabas sees what he never saw before. He has an entirely new outlook. He is a Hellenist—that is, he is a Jew who has had the advantage of some Greek training, and may perhaps have sat in the halls of the University of Tarsus with that eager Hebrew student, Saul; but the picture painted by Luke is not of a man of wide learning or superlative genius, but of a man who sees, and sees at once, the facts that count, and sees them in their true relation to one another and to life. He has what Paul calls "the

mind of the Spirit," which is "the mind of Christ"; He sees all things in God, and God in all things—himself and his fellows, his own property and the needs of others; and he accepts and uses the estimates of the things of this life given by that sight. He is delivered from the "fleshly" mind, and from selfish and self-centred ways of thinking and acting, and moves under the sway of convictions that make God and the soul the supreme realities. Thus, for example, he is the owner of a field in Cyprus; but he sees it as God's property, and not his own,—it is part of the Divine patrimony of which he is a responsible trustee,—and therefore he turns it into cash, and takes the money to the leaders of the Church, to be used by them in bringing consolation to the needy members of the family of God.

Again, with the insight of a seer he springs to meet the necessity presented by the conversion of Saul. As an eagle swoops down to protect the nest which contains her young at the moment she sees them in peril, so Barnabas hastes to the side of the young disciple, opens the door of the Church for his entrance, seeks to disarm the prejudice created by his fierce and bitter persecution of the new faith, acts as his advocate, secures for him the confidence of the leaders of the Church, and provides opportunities for him to bear his witness to the claims of Jesus as the Christ. So he acts as a veritable "son of encouragement"—backs the

strange story Saul tells of his experiences, shields him from suspicion, and nourishes his faith by his trust and goodness, when others would hold him at a distance and chill the new-born ardours of his soul by their lack of faith in the grace of God.

And when he is commissioned to inspect and report on the new departure at Antioch, he displays the same good sense, clear judgment, and sound mind. The novelty and daring of these unauthorised missionaries does not startle him, the rapturous excitement does not mislead him. He does not condemn the movement because it is new, or refuse to see its worth because it is not according to "apostolic orders." He pierces at once to the heart of things, rejoices at the proofs of the working of the grace of God in an unexpected quarter and in unforeseen ways, and, rising to the highest demands of the occasion, prepares the way for a cordial welcome by the guardians of the faith at Jerusalem of this wonderful expansion of original Christianity.

That is the new fact. That is what is due to the Holy Ghost. Barnabas sees clearly and sanely; sees clearly what was altogether hidden before, and sees sanely what he saw selfishly before, for his eye is single, and his whole body is full of the Holy Ghost. You may call that "intellectual regeneration," with Chalmers, if you will, or the spiritualisation of the intellect, as I would rather describe it; but the fact is this, however you name it—the entrance of the whole man into a new world of thought, his emergence from the lower and

darker realms of pure sense and sheer intellectualism on to the highest plane of life and thought, from whence his outlook on the contents of experience and possibility makes all things new. Romanes says there are four "well-marked and universally recognised distinctions in human life—animality, intellectuality, morality, and spirituality," and he adds: "Morality and spirituality are to be distinguished as two very different things. A man may be highly moral in his conduct without being in any degree spiritual in his nature, and, though to a lesser extent, *vice versa*." So I hold that intellectuality and spirituality are two very different things. One man may be keenly intellectual, and yet as blind as a bat to the things of the Spirit; and another may be ignorant of literature, a stranger to the kingdom of culture, and yet a master of the spiritual life. Peter and John are an offence to the ecclesiastical statesmen of Jerusalem because they dare to initiate a revolution whilst they are "ignorant and unlearned men"; but the ages testify that they were the men who were "of the truth" and saw the truth, who knew the forces that make for progress and could wield them, and who had taken possession of and uttered the ideas that have led the life of the world. It is John Bunyan, a man who has the training of a tinker and not of a university, who has gathered at his feet as willing listeners more men, women, and children than any other teacher outside the charmed circle of the builders of the Bible. It is George Fox, a man who owes nothing to the schools, who utters truths

of revelation which the Churches have not yet fully understood, although the later years have brought us much nearer to his mind. It has been said: "The decisive movements of the world are accomplished in the intellect." That is true as it stands of material and scientific progress, but it is comprehensive of all the facts only when we speak of the intellect as quickened, regenerated, and spiritualised, as taught and swayed by the Spirit of God. It is from the succession of God-inspired prophets we derive the spiritual wealth of Israel. It is to that we owe Christianity itself, and its successive re-births, or "reformations" or "revivals," as we call them; for every revival is an intellectual advance, a perception of a new truth of the gospel, or a fresh vision of an old and forgotten truth, or an application to fresh facts and needs of such truths, old and new. Men like Paul and Augustine, Francis and Eckhart, Luther and Calvin, Arminius and Wesley, Beecher and Booth, full of the Holy Ghost, experience an exaltation of intelligence, an expansion of the intellectual faculty, a quickening of mind; they are raised to the "heavenlies," and see from thence what men have not seen before, interpret the facts around them on their spiritual and Divine sides, and so introduce a new day in the lives of individuals and of communities.

Nor can we doubt that the "revival" that is in progress in Wales now is the work of that same Spirit. It is everywhere confessed that its Barnabas is an ordinary, everyday man, but "full of the Holy Ghost."

There is nothing exceptional about him: he is not a genius, he is not a scholar; but he sees and feels afresh and passionately the love of God for men. It possesses him, dominates him, and inspires him; and he goes on from conquest to conquest, meeting the special needs of this hour, demonstrating in scores of undeniable facts that *heredity* and the *power of habit* (on which our recent science has been insisting with disastrous effect upon the sense of personal responsibility) neither deliver us from that personal responsibility for our actions nor stand in the way of the destruction of bad habits by the redeeming and renewing grace of God. That is the message we need, and that is the message God is giving to us in these last days with accumulating force in this revival. Let us heed it at once, and

“Speak to Him thou for He hears,
And Spirit with spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing,
And nearer than hands and feet.”

2. But whilst the chief emphasis is given by Luke to the change produced in the conception of life and its meaning and purpose by Barnabas, he also makes clear his glowing and active sympathy with progress. A man full of the Holy Ghost is chosen to mediate between the conservative and progressive elements of religion. The Spirit of God is the spirit of progress, the force which impels humanity on the upward path towards its predestined goal. Where the Spirit of God is there is progress. The Bible shows an advance

in spiritual truth, in spiritual ideal from book to book, from the lower to the higher, and from the higher to the highest; and as the chronological order of the books of the Bible is better known the more this law appears. God leads the generations on by the men in whom He dwells; therefore Barnabas, being wholly surrendered to His leadership, welcomes the daring that moves beyond the narrow ranges marked out by the leaders at Jerusalem, keeps step with the advancing grace of God, and encourages new and unexpected converts to walk worthy of their high vocation. Men filled with God will not suspect every new voice, or allow themselves to be captives to what was said by them of old time. They will be “narrow as the righteousness and broad as the charity of God,” but always in strongest sympathy with the progressive movements of the kingdom of heaven.

3. But Barnabas is not content to sympathise with progress, he leads it. He knows that he belongs to those who set the pattern “how to live.” Not reluctantly, but eagerly and at once, he accepts the responsibility of leadership, and leads in selling his Cyprian property; leads in inducing Saul twice over to take up the work of the gospel; leads, at the start at least, in the new missionary work amongst Jews and Gentiles. He is a magnetic man; men are drawn to him as flowers to the light. His voice is cheery, his words feed courage, his presence radiates comfort and gladness. He is a lovable man, lifting those around him into a higher and sunnier sphere. Oh, the

incalculable value of such men in the home, in school and the Church, in city and in State. Whom are we leading, and whither? Let us search our souls in the full light of truth and fact for the answer!

Nor is it without reason that our history tells us that this "man full of the Holy Ghost" has his weaknesses and faults. Higher titles could hardly be given than those he wears, and yet when he is thrust into a place of special temptation he proves himself too easy-going; and, weakly complying with the hurtful prejudices of others, suffers himself to be carried away with the disloyalty to principle of Peter, and the mean timidities of John Mark. Even those of us who realise most fully the presence of the Spirit of God have need to pray that we may never "quench" nor "grieve" the Spirit of God, but always yield ourselves entirely to His gracious and perfecting power. Thus will our Whitsuntide cease to be a fleeting annual visit, and become a perpetual and increasing joy.

XIV

THE SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING

"Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me ; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God."—Ps. l. 23.

THIS is the conclusion of one of the most dramatic of the psalms of the later and more fruitful period of the Exile.

God is pictured as summoning His people to judgment in the presence of the attesting heavens and the wide earth. He is Judge Himself, and claims to act. His character is without spot or blemish. The heavens declare His righteousness. His rule is perfect, His justice is without fault, and His requirements from men are final and unimpeachable.

He speaks, but He speaks in tender pity, though in unmistakable rejection, of the sacrifice of the beasts of the forests and the cattle of the hills, which men, in their confused conceptions of His character and of the nature of true religion, have made. He accepts the motive of the worshippers, but He points out a more excellent way, saying: "Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto

the Most High; and call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

Then comes the description of the immoralities into which Israel has fallen through depending upon external and material sacrifices and treating them as though they were the soul of religion. Revelation is despised. Conscience is blinded. Character is debased. The sure judgments of God are ignored, and Israel lives heedless of its doom. "Now, consider this," says the Judge, "ye that forget God. God is just. Wrong cannot go unpunished. Religion is a sacrifice of thanksgiving, the ordering of life aright; thus and thus only do men find salvation."

This is a remarkable statement, and, for the time, a singularly spiritual description of religion. There is no trace of the outward ceremonial upon it. It is completely cleansed of pagan ideas. It goes to the very centre of a true and full religious life. It expresses the Divine mind, and brings us at once face to face with the principles that lie at the heart of a strong, healthy, all-round happy and joyous life.

I do not say it is perfect; it is not. For it finds no place for that helpful, neighbourly service of which Jesus speaks in the second of the two commandments, and to which James refers when he says that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is" (that is, pure worship is), "to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction." Our prophet-poet says nothing directly of this social service; but when every

deduction is made that we feel we must make in the light of the fuller revelation of religion by Christ Jesus, yet we must regard this description as a high and noteworthy characterisation of some of the chief factors of a genuinely religious life.

Four things are taught us here. First, the prophet assumes that the chief end of man is to glorify God, to hallow His name, and obey His will; to enthrone the highest, to advance all that is good and true to dominion in the life of the world. Secondly, he asserts that a continuously grateful, trustful, and joyous life glorifies God. Thirdly, he tells us that to men who live on that Divine plane there comes a vision of God's redeeming love, the energy of His cleansing Spirit, the fulness of His salvation. And lastly, he sets down the fact in menacing words that an awful but just doom is sure to overtake any life that is not ordered in righteousness and enriched with thanksgiving and praise.

Of these ideas I select for illustration and enforcement this morning that which represents religion as a sacrifice of praise, a continuous offering of trust and love and worship to God; a perpetual sacrifice, not of the "mass," but of the man, body and spirit, to God; not in reluctant and hesitating acquiescence with the Divine claims, but in joyous and songful obedience to the eternal will and in eager and delighted service of the heavenly kingdom. It is an attitude of soul towards God springing out of the recognition of His loving character and redemptive rule; a life

not embroidered with praise at far-parted points, but unbrokenly marked by that joyousness which Goethe says is "the mother of all the virtues," and which inevitably issues from a life that is ordered according to the will of God.

The Catechism answers the familiar question, "What is the chief end of man?" by saying it is to "glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." Both question and answer are strokes of genius; but the answer, like so many other answers, starts another question: "When and how do we glorify God?" And this question is constantly rising before us, for we know this is our business as disciples of Jesus Christ. The prayer He offered is ours day by day: "Father, glorify Thy name." We know we are predestinated, redeemed, renewed for this; and though with frequent failure, yet with yearning spirit we are working by all the processes we can to glorify God.

But again we ask, What is the sacrifice of praise? Is it the offering of the Sabbath hymn in which we express adoration, trust, and love, and hope in rhythmical lines and sweet melodies? It is that, but much more. Praise has a thousand voices. The songful life expresses itself in myriad ways; but the essence of every sacrifice is the adoring, grateful, and joyous offering of ourselves on the altar of God. It is a joyful welcome to His holy will, as right in itself and as carrying all who receive it towards righteousness and blessedness. It is the eager entrance upon the lot He appoints for us, with its burdens, its crosses, its

troubles, whatever they may be; the courageous and whole-hearted dedication of ourselves to the entire order of our human living, for education, for discipline, for the perfection of character, for the establishment of His kingdom upon earth. It is, when we can do nothing else, breathing the spirit which says, "'Tis sweet to lie passive in His hands and know no will but His"; or it is even voiceless, the silent offering of thanksgiving that "God's in His heaven" and that all must be right with His world; or, again, it is the quick and strong-handed seizure of fleeting opportunities to witness for His truth, suffer for His rights, and even die for His victories, feeling that

"This world's no blot for us
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good;
To find its meaning is my meat and drink."

Now that clearly is the religion of the whole Psalter. Look at these songs. They are sacrifices of thanksgiving. They are full of praise. Troubles and sorrows are here; fierce conflicts with evil are described. The tremendous burden of living is never ignored, the attacks of bitter enemies are admitted, but there is over all and through all a glad recognition of God's sovereignty of life, and a deep delight in His redeeming sway. "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." But the singer does not faint. He keeps on his feet; he holds on his journey towards his goal. Calamities, misfortunes crowd his path; but he knows and believes

that it is part of the eternal order that the "goodness" must come: it is pre-ordained; life is shaped to it; and therefore on he goes, head aloft, foot firmly planted, and songs of rejoicing in his heart.

The Psalter is praise, and inspires praise. It is the sacrifice of souls in trouble and in joy, in dark and cloudy days and in the healing sunshine, in the thirsty desert and the dewy mead; and its strains stir the soul of the reader, whatever may be his condition, till he too joins in the offering, and calls upon his soul and all that is within him to bless and praise God's holy name.

Everywhere the Book of Psalms is a book of joy. This old Hebrew classic has gone through the generations of men as an angel of the presence of the Lord, entering into the huts of the lowly and filling them with the radiance of God, penetrating the gloom of the palace and making it as the sanctuary of the Highest, lighting the path of the weary pilgrim in the valley of the shadow of death, spreading with plenty the tables of life even in the presence of enemies, and filling him with the assurance that God will lead him in the path of life, until he stands in that presence where there is fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore. Like the good shepherd, it has led the flock of God beside the still waters of peace and into the green pastures of truth. Like a conquering general, it has braced the sacramental hosts of God for the fight against evil and for righteousness and liberty. It has been medicine to the diseased, an anodyne to care, a solace for the sad, a herald of deliverance to the imprisoned, courage for the

despondent, a light shining in the dark places of life, and an unfailing fountain of joy. The religion of the Psalms is the religion of thanksgiving, of triumphant joy in God; and the book itself is, excepting one, the best commentary upon the words, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God."

That other and better exposition is the New Testament. It takes the songs of the prophet-poets and sets them in a new key. It makes it possible for men to surpass the heroism of the martyrs of the Maccabean time, and to exhibit a steadfastness of purpose and fulness of joy, and even exultation of soul in tribulation, which shows that they ascended to higher ranges of life than the finest of the Hebrew race before. It is the fruit, no doubt, of the principles which Christianity takes up out of the Old Testament; but it is expressed with greater clearness and force in the concrete example of Jesus Christ Himself, and demonstrated in a great series of historic facts, of which He is the centre and the source. The three thousand on the day of Pentecost scarcely had met together before it is remarked that they ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. Their very meals are festive. Joy is a guest at their tables. The Lord's Supper is for them the Eucharist, the service of thanksgiving. It is a joy to be alive as the re-born children of God. They are persecuted, but they are not cast down; they are trampled upon by their fellows, but they rise up again and declare their persisting faith. They are put

under conditions most irksome and painful, but they follow the precepts of their leaders, which assure them that their business is to be always joyful. It was hard teaching, and it seems especially so when you look at it in the light of the condition of the Thessalonians, who first of all received it. Gauge the severity of the persecutions which they had to endure, and which Paul himself admitted were such as almost to "unnerve them," yet to them he said, "Be always joyful," "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." He had learned that teaching from the Master, who told His disciples to rejoice and be triumphant when they were insulted and persecuted, and every cruel thing was said about them falsely for His name's sake : that was the special moment, Jesus said, when they were to show their gladness ; then it was their joyousness was to find its song ; in such conditions they were to mount on wings as eagles, run without weariness, and walk without fainting. And they did. Paul speaks for others as well as himself when he says : "I know that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in our developed goodness, perfected love, and enlarged life." It is literal truth to say that they gloried in tribulation. It is a demonstrable fact that "original Christianity was a gospel of salvation by joy." "The highest theory that the world's rarest and best piety had arrived at before Christ came was the idea of salvation by suffering." "Pain had been accepted as a means, as a

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discipline; Jesus substituted the discipline of joy.”¹ It is historic fact that real religion, inspired, quickened, and sustained by the revelation God has given of Himself in and through prophets, and pre-eminently in Christ, has been productive of this attitude of mind, this joyous welcome of the will of God concerning life, and thankful discharge of whatsoever duty may come into it.

One of my friends, the late Principal of the University of Chicago, one of the foremost scholars of the United States, and one of the most strenuous figures in American life, Dr. Harper, never had a finer tribute paid to him than was paid by a daily newspaper a little while ago. He was threatened with death; he had undergone two or three operations of a most severe kind; and one of the newspapers, describing him, said: “He has seen the bitter waters rising to his lips, and he has not flinched. He has suffered torturing pain, and—he has smiled. Like one of the triumphant martyrs at the stake, he has felt his life slowly ebbing away, and has lifted up his voice in praise to God.”

Another Principal, Principal Cairns, tells us about the death of his father, and of the behaviour of his mother on that occasion. When his father died, after protracted suffering, there was a short pause, till each of the family circle had learnt what had happened. Then the mother, in a broken voice, asked that “the

¹ *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*, by Prof. A. G. Hogg, M.A., 106.

books" might be laid on the table, and then she gave out the verse—

"The storm is changed into a calm,
At His command and will ;
So that the waves that raged before
Now quiet are and still."

It was her voice that raised the tune. Then she asked her eldest son to read a chapter out of the Bible, and afterwards to pray. When they knelt down the son made a strong effort to steady his voice, and failed utterly, and, he says, "the dear mother herself lifted up the voice of thanksgiving for the victory that had been won." "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God." That was the sacrifice of praise.

These are not pages from a novel, they are not excerpts from some romance; they are facts, and they carry us to the loftiest heights of the religious life. They take us to those serene and exalted places called by the Apostle Paul "the heavenlies," where the soul dwells with Christ, and, dwelling with Him, is able to look out on life, not in its fragments, but in its wholeness, and to see that its issue is good, intrinsically good: that all is surely working for the best, and that therefore the soul is never rightly looking on life except when it is looking out upon it with grateful heart and joyous reliance upon the Eternal Father. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in the Lord."

Now this fruit comes as naturally from the Christian tree as the lovely green of the grass and the beautiful

foliage of the trees come from the abounding life of nature.

There are four principles in Christianity which, being recognised, make it possible for us to take this attitude, I will not say easy, for nothing that is worth having is obtained with ease. And the first of these four principles is this, "The gospel brings life to light," shows it as it really is, and shows what it is meant for,—even our spiritual emancipation, education, perfection,—and that all the things that go to make it are intended for the refining of our character and fashioning it after the pattern which is given to us in Christ Jesus. To recognise this is to be able to put things in their true places; to see the contents of changing experience in their true perspective; to take up the contradictory factors of life, and make them work harmoniously towards one glorious result.

The second thing that Christianity tells us is that God is in this life, right through it; that His redemptive purpose on Calvary underlies it, runs through it, mounts to the top of it; that the whole significance of life is redemptive; that God is getting rid of the sin and evil of the world; that He is engaged in that task, and that therefore, though we may be despondent about our puny efforts, and very frequently ready to throw our tools aside, and give up our ploughing and sowing because of the seemingly infinite distance of the harvest, yet, since He is at work, we can hold on and be assured that His purpose will triumph and His counsel stand fast.

Thirdly, Christianity inspires a man to make the fullest use of his life. Life according to Christ is opportunity for service, a chance of being and doing something that shall issue in the advancement of mankind. The Christian is cured of that fatal curse which puts self first and foremost. He sets the kingdom of God first, and works for that, and he therefore sees in the whole of his life simply so much opportunity to do other people good, to help other people to God, to speak the word that shall glorify Him, believing in the infinite possibilities of good in every single stroke of sincere and well-directed toil.

Yesterday I was reading of Dr. Lorimer's conversion. He was engaged in Louisville as an actor, having given himself to the life of the stage. Two women, Mrs. Everts being one of them, were distributing invitations to places of worship. They went to a tenement, and they came to where a young fellow lived who said, "You don't want godless actors to come to your service?" "Oh yes, we do," said this motherly woman; "we shall be delighted to see you." "Well, then, I will come," said he. "But is there not somebody else you can bring?" said the lady. "Yes," replied the young man, "I know a young fellow who might be persuaded to come." That young fellow was Lorimer. He went, and the two young men were brought to God that night, and led ultimately from the stage to the pulpit. The inspiration that comes from Christianity to treat life as a great mass of opportunities, waiting for the alert mind and the prompt will to

turn them to advantage for the good of humanity, makes possible a life of increasing gladness and of deepening joy.

Still further does it go. It sustains us in bearing life's burdens, in carrying life's crosses, and in fighting life's battles. It gives us the true perspective, places us where we can best learn the supreme truths, truths that count, and yield the true interpretation of facts. We cease to judge God by "feeble sense," and trust Him for His grace; knowing that behind what seems a frowning Providence He hides a smiling face. It is not a question of temperament, sunny or phlegmatic, though that has something to do with it; it is really a question of thought and faith, of discipleship to Christ, of perfect surrender to the will of God. It is not a question of youth. The old may be as mirthful and as glad as the young, as buoyant in spirit, and as strong in soul as those who are conscious of great physical resources and are filled with the vision of the infinite possibilities of living. Longfellow, when his hair was white and his cheeks as ruddy as a rose, was asked by one of his admiring friends, "How is it that you are still so vigorous, and that it is possible for you to write so beautifully?" and the answer was this: "Look at that apple tree: it is the oldest apple tree there is in our grounds, and yet its blossoms this year are as beautiful as I have ever known them during the last fifty years. The secret is simply this—the tree makes a little new wood every year, and out of the new wood comes the lovely blossom." We have to

go on making a little new wood every year, and then we shall still bring forth blossom and fruit in old age, and show that the Lord is upright, and that there is no unrighteousness in Him. "Through Him"—that is, through Christ—"let us continually lay on the altar a sacrifice of praise to God, namely, the utterance of lips that give thanks to His name; and do not forget to be kind and liberal, for with sacrifices of that sort God is greatly pleased."

On this spring morning I invite you to the sacrifice of thanksgiving. The birds wake us early in the morning with their orchestral music; they invite us to commence the day with songful hearts. Day unto day speaks of praise. Browning's picture conveys the lesson of springtime—

"Oh to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!
And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be joy when noontide wakes anew.
The buttercups, the little children's dower,
Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!"

It is springtide in nature: let it be the springtide in our religious experience. The full tides of spiritual energy are here. Let us rise with them, and in the fulness and overflow of the soul's devotion to God offer to Him day by day those sacrifices of love and joy, of trust and service, with which He is well pleased.

XV

DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not think meanly of utterances of prophecy.”—1 THESS. v. 19, 20.

“DO not quench the Spirit. Do not think meanly of utterances of prophecy.” That is the counsel that is to direct some of our Sunday morning meditations throughout this year. We welcome it for its simplicity and strength, for its fine daring and for the bracing though perilous heights of freedom to which it carries us. Its meaning lies on the surface. What is difficult is a wise and perfectly sane obedience to it. But the Spirit whose hot fires burn in us and in the world is the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and therefore we may confidently expect that the Father will give us all the aid we need for a full and thoroughgoing obedience to Paul’s instruction.

Clearly this counsel bids us give free play to God in and over our life, our whole life, our individual and social life, our family and church life, our business and civic life. Do not hinder God. Do not stand in His way. Do not suppress or stifle His action. Let His fires burn on. Do not quench the flax that only faintly

smokes with the fire that He has lit. His breath will make it burst into flame. Do not break the bruised reed He has set up again and is holding straight in its soil by His strength. As Diogenes said to Alexander, so we must say to any person or thing that blocks the march of God, "Stand aside." It is our duty to respond at once to His call. "Whatsoever He says to us we must do." Like Philip the deacon, we must allow ourselves to be carried by the winds of God across the desert, though we may not see the eunuch to whom we are to speak, confident, even if we do not know where he is, that he is waiting for our God-inspired word. And if that same Spirit checks us in our work, and turns our feet away from Bithynia, it is only that a door may be opened for us into the Europe of a wider mission and a more fruitful activity. "Do not quench the Spirit!" Let God work in you to will and to do as He pleases.

It is a cardinal direction for the spiritual life. It goes down to the utmost depths of our life, and carries us far beyond the artificial and superficial, the conventional and traditional, to the real, the inward, and spiritually natural. It bids us open all the windows of the soul to the light of God from all quarters of the compass. Nay, rather, it reminds us of the deep saying of Browning that—

"To know
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without."

But that is not all. The counsel is wider. Paul follows the advice to secure freedom for the work of the Spirit in *ourselves* with the direction: Give full scope to the energies of God in *others*. "Despise not prophesyings." Do not quench the Spirit in others by thinking meanly of them and of their work and words. Your judgment is not final, nor is it infallible. Be tolerant and charitable. There is more in heaven and earth, and in the Church, than is dreamt of in your orthodoxy. Make not your taste the standard of truth. Judge the messages, not by the messenger's manner, his ignorance or his culture, but by their intrinsic values. See how they work out in experience. Estimate them according to the good that is in them and is wrought by them. Thrust them not aside because they are strange or new. Sift the chaff from the wheat, the dross from the pure gold. Never reject the pearl because of the casket in which it is offered. Do not despise anyone through whom God speaks, or any way in which He works, or any methods through which He acts. Let there be the fullest freedom. That is the counsel for the Christian community; that is its native air, its vital breath. Order is not heaven's first law, nor yet its second. Truth is first and freedom is second, and is a condition of attaining to truth and order. Judge righteous judgment. Do not hinder or suppress by cheap contempt and proud disdain. Give free course to the truth, and it will glorify itself. Do not quench the Spirit in the Church or in the world. Let the fires of God burn on.

I

Two points I will urge to-day. First, that at the back of these counsels is the reassuring and all-inspiring fact that God Himself is at work for the redemption and regeneration of mankind—at work now, always at work; invisible, but at work; felt when not seen; pressing on when persistently resisted; burning up the evils and wrongs in man, and flooding him with the energies of righteousness and peace.

That is the primary fact. The fires of God are burning on and on for the purification of our race. It may seem to us who are engaged in the very thick of the battle that the General has left the fight. He has not. It is true

“He hides Himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.”

But it is for us to secure the strength which comes from

“The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when He
Is most invisible.”

That it is God's perpetual delight to work in us to will and to do, so that we may work out our own and the world's salvation, is the fundamental working conviction of the Apostle Paul. It is his way of interpreting the long and confused story of humanity. It explains

its mysteries and illuminates its darkest passages with a ray of prophetic hope. It accounts for the presence and power of the "holy remnant," and the elevation of Israel to the position of chief missionary of the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is the source of the marvellous energy that sent the new societies of believers in Christ into the centres of paganism fearless, invincible, and cleansing. And, finally, it is the idea of God that forms the keystone of the great arch of Divine revelation.

For that idea of God, the Spirit, burning like a fire in the heart of humanity, carries with it Paul's governing conceptions of the universality of God and of His gospel, of the incessant working of the love of God in reconciling the world unto Himself, of the essential inwardness and spirituality of His kingdom, and of the freedom of the Divine action from the limitations and restrictions imposed by man.

Slowly the Eternal Teacher had been leading the world from age to age to this view of Himself. Not so did the patriarchs figure Him. To them He was the Creator, the Builder of the heavens and of the earth; the Lord God Almighty, fashioning the materials of the Creation in fresh forms of wonder and beauty. But matter, however shaped, is suggestive of fixity and limitation. It localises God as though He were able to work only within prescribed bounds, fixes Him on a throne, surrounds Him with a court as though He were an earthly monarch, and, in completely humanising Him, fails to give us that sense of the freeness and

everywhereness of His activity which are the characteristics of the Spirit.

A most fruitful advance in the knowledge of God is made by the prophets of Israel. To them comes the vision of the Divine method of choosing elect individuals as the guides and teachers of men, and through them redeeming and training His chosen people. God is no longer merely an august and sovereign figure in the realm of visible things. He moves into the hearts and minds of men, reveals Himself to their thoughts, and works through their powers of faith and heroism. He heals the broken in heart, as well as tells the number of the stars. He restores the soul, and leads men in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, as well as builds and upholds the heavens and the earth. He delivers the Israelites from their foes, intervenes for their safety, and "shows them the great things of His law." He is the refuge and home of the soul. It is a spiritual conception, and, therefore, prepares men to think of God as the "Saviour of the whole earth," "pouring out His Spirit," as Joel says, "upon all flesh."

The next step is still more inward: for the Levitical idea of God is as the God of conscience, who deals with the dim, dull ache of guilt; welcomes to Himself the soul that comes along the path of sacrifice, self-renunciation, and surrender. The tragedy of guilt that drives men to despair closes in the removal of the obstacle to man's approach to God out of the

way; and it is declared by sacrificial symbols and a sacerdotal priesthood that God not only comes to and speaks by elect men like Samuel and Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, but that guilty men may be made "at one" with the thrice-holy God. It is a later phase of revelation, and an advance in intensity if not in extension.

The further stage necessary to prepare Israel for its spiritual and spiritualising work was reached through the fiercely cleansing fires of the Exile. The natural and human clinging to the symbol as if it were the substance, to the temple as if it were God's only home, and to the priest as if he were God Himself, was well-nigh destroyed by the centuries of the dispersion; and though the detachment from the sacramental and the sacerdotal was never quite complete, yet the bonds were so shattered and broken that at the beginning of the Christian era many were those who were prepared to listen with eager and hopeful hearts to the words of Him who was the express image of the Eternal Spirit and the brightness of the glory of the Father, as He not only declared the fact of the Fatherhood of God but also exhibited in Himself the contents and qualities of that Fatherhood, and added to the good news that "God is a Spirit" the complete sufficiency and abiding efficiency of the ever-present Spirit for securing the redemption and the renewal of mankind.

Now Paul derived his final doctrine of God immediately from Jesus Christ. It pleased God to reveal Himself in revealing His Son in him and to him.

Therefore, his doctrine of the Spirit is the doctrine of Jesus, and held the place in his thinking that it held in the thought and teaching of Jesus. It is the soul of his theology and of his ethics, of his ideas of life and of God, of sin and salvation, of duty and destiny, of man and society. It is everything to him; it is central and formative; it is the brilliant sun in the system of his thought. All his ideas are cast in these moulds. He lives in the "dispensation of the Spirit." He "walks" and works in the Spirit. He is set free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is the creative force that has made him a new man. It accounts for his marvellous experience, and it helps him to understand everyone else's. Jesus is God, the Spirit localised, manifested, standing on the solid earth, brought to the very heart of our life, making all things new. The Lord is the Spirit, and by the Lord Jesus is meant the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there are freedom, fruitfulness, overflowing energy, conquering faith, and triumphant joy, new men and new societies, a new literature and a new world. Therefore, says he, give the Spirit free play; let the Spirit work in you the whole of His will. Do not stand in His way for a moment. Do not think meanly of any of His utterances. Walk, live, work in the Spirit. There is our duty, first and last, and in full obedience to it is an exceeding great reward.

II

If this counsel is based on Paul's doctrine of God, it is made emphatic and urgent by its suggestion of his reading of the *history of man*.

The key to our human history is that man has from the earliest time been in antagonism to God, to goodness and justice, to righteousness and mercy, to truth and progress. It is the pathetic lament, wrung from the heart of Jehovah as He surveys the struggles of men against His beneficent sway, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." From the beginning the will of man has been set for his own hurt; he has sinned against his own soul, because he would not yield to the persuasions and warnings of the Eternal. He has quenched the fires of Divine life in the world.

Nor is the history of Israel dissimilar from that of primeval times. "They rebelled against My Spirit," is the brief but accurate summary of the doings of the children of Abraham. The contents of the records of the founders and judges, prophets and kings of Israel, could not be more truly epitomised.

But the most painful proof of all is seen in the life of Jesus. He came to His own, but His own received Him not. The light shone in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not. Men were so blinded in their antagonism to goodness that they opposed the Son of God, the perfect Christ, as though He were a demon. They admitted His power—they could not deny it. They recognised His strength, redeeming

and healing ; they could not resist the evidences of it ; but they accounted for it, as people do still when they find a fact in collision with their theories, by saying, "He is mad," "He has a demon."

There was a man blind and dumb and insane. Christ came, and a triple wonder was accomplished : the three diseases disappeared, and the man stood sane, seeing, speaking. The excitement was intense ; the people were ready to take the wonder-worker and make Him their king. Besides, He had just chosen twelve men to be with Him as His colleagues and helpers, and it looked as though He were forming a party. As the Pharisees saw this thing they said : "This man works these marvels by the power of Beelzebub ; the Prince of devils is His master. You must explain His doings by reference to Satan." Jesus heard the challenge, accepted it at once, and replied on the spot. "What !" said He, "does Satan fight himself ? Does the Prince of the demons cast out demons ? Is that likely ? The absurdity of the charge only needs to be stated to be exposed." So Christ met their malicious prejudice, and told them that their antagonism to Him, the Son of Man, might be forgiven, but their resistance to the Spirit of God showed an obstinacy and malice that made repentance impossible, and therefore could not be forgiven.

On the same day a crowd gathered about Christ, and on the fringe of it, in great excitement, were the mother and brothers of our Lord. They were anxious. They had become possessed of the notion that Jesus

was losing His senses, and wished to seize Him and put Him under control. Is it possible, you ask, that the mother of Jesus could have yielded to that? Certainly it seems so from the record; and mothers have been known, in their fear and timidity, to quench the fires of the Spirit in their families, to damp down the desires of their sons and daughters to go to the missionary field, to suggest the restraint for their passionate ardour on behalf of causes exposing them to peril, and to hint that they would be far wiser to take the ease offered by the open door into the paternal business or profession. All mothers are not Spartans, ready to say to their sons, "Return with your shield, or on it"—a victor, or a hero slain in the fight. It is not every mother who would say, as the mother of William Knibb said to him when he was leaving for mission work amongst the slaves of Jamaica: "Remember, I would rather hear that you have perished in the sea than that you have disgraced the cause you go to serve." Anyway, Mary and the family, as they stood outside the crowd, became impatient, and sent a message to Jesus to bring the controversy to an end, and come over to them. How did Jesus meet this attempt—made in love, if in mistake—to put out the fires of zeal burning within Him? He said, "My mother and My brothers? Who are they?"—and pointing to the men of His choice, He said, "My mother and My brothers and sisters are they who do the will of God," and by that stroke suppressed this effort to quench the Spirit of God.

All through the later part of the ministry of Christ Jesus this resistance was carried on, and at last culminated in His crucifixion, when He was put to death in the flesh, but raised again in the Spirit, and in that Spirit ascended to empire, and became the Eternal Spiritual Ruler of mankind.

There was already danger *within* the Church at Thessalonica that the same evil would reappear, and efforts be made to check the movements of the Spirit of God within the free society of believers in the Lord Jesus. Remember that this letter places us at the very beginnings of Christianity. This is, in all likelihood, the earliest fragment of New Testament literature. Not a quarter of a century has elapsed since the fervour and glow of Pentecost. The fires are still burning at white heat. Everybody is alive and active. Their industry is immense. Every man is a missionary. The fame of their work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope has resounded afar. They are young and immature, and not by any means free from illusions. They are filled with a keen and eager expectation of drastic alterations in the life of the world. They make mistakes. Some of them think that a social revolution may break out at any moment, and evil be judged and overthrown through a special and striking advent of the Christ. Paul himself had taught them to expect it. Such advents were possible, and, in the destruction of Jerusalem and other epoch-making events, occurred.

Certainly, those ideas put the Church in a ferment.

Paul himself shared them. A feverish restlessness obtained, a failure to set out matters in their right proportions followed, and Paul probably felt insecure in reference to some of them, as we may gather from his second letter ; and yet he said, "Do not quench the Spirit." Do not suppress these ideas of the advent of Jesus. Mind what you are about. You do not understand these "comings" of Christ to-day, but you may to-morrow or in years to come. Examine these statements. Sift them. Prove them. Think not meanly of them because they are mine, or because of their source. But test them, and then hold fast that which you find to be good.

A similar situation, from other causes, arose in Corinth. The Church is on the brink of grave disorder. Every man has his gift. The society experiences an embarrassment of spiritual riches. To everyone is the Spirit given. One has a psalm, another a sermon, a third a revelation, a fourth a tongue, and a fifth an interpretation. Yet Paul, whilst he advises that all things shall be done decently and with a view to character-building, does not say, "This is not of God." No ; he will not put out the fires of the Spirit. There was peril in the splendid wealth of the Church, *but far greater peril in limiting the freedom of the children of God.* There, as to the Thessalonians, he says, "Be joyful, always joyful. Be unceasing in prayer. In everything give thanks. Do not quench the Spirit. Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." Let us beware. The sin of man from the beginning

and throughout the ages has been that of quenching the truth, resisting the movements of God. We must not yield to the many temptations to follow them, but wait on God. Give Him room within your soul, and within your families, and within your church, and beyond. Let Him play freely over all your nature, imagination and heart, conscience and will. Nobody can tell what God can do with a fully surrendered soul, what use He can make of us if we are His, and have no selfish purpose, and keep our whole life, in business and out, in pleasure and in work, in church and in the world, fully subordinated to His will. In the Lord the Spirit, the weakest may become mighty as David, and David as ten thousand, if only we let God have His way.

XVI

THE GLADNESS OF GOD IN SAVING MEN

“According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.”
—1 TIM. i. 11.

FEW words are more familiar than those which speak of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” They are part of the cherished and most precious current coin of the Christian Church. But they have been so long in use that they have become worn, and the image and superscription upon them have been so defaced that it is difficult for us now to appraise them at their original value. Therefore, our Revisers have cast them into the smelting-pot and reminted them. They have put upon them a device which compels us, in one aspect of it, to think, not of the glory of the gospel, but of the glory of the God of the gospel; not of the glorious gospel as literature, or as presenting us with salvation which is exactly adapted to the necessities of man’s nature, but of the gospel as having for its contents a revelation of the glory of God Himself, of the deep gladness of God, and of that gladness as exhibited in His work to save mankind.

We are in the habit of speaking of the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and by such language we indicate certain brief tractates bound up in our New Testament, and bearing these names as the names of their authors or compilers. But we also speak of the Gospel of Jesus, the Son of God, and by that we denote the same tractates, as containing the story of the life of Jesus, the beginnings of His ministry, the words that He spake and the works that He performed. It is in the second sense that the Apostle Paul, in speaking of the gospel he preached and used, employs the term "gospel" as having for its contents revelations of the glory of the blessed God—"according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God."

Note that this phrase is incidental; yet it is so comprehensive and suggestive that I believe we shall find four of the most important facts in connection with the gospel presented to us.

First of all, God is revealed to us as glad to redeem.

Secondly, God's gladness to redeem is seen in Christ, the brightness of His glory and the express radiance of His character.

Thirdly, God known in the gospel as glad to redeem is God saving, saving now, saving fully, and saving always.

And lastly, God revealed to us in His delight in redemption is for us a fount of ethical life, of ethical inspiration and energy.

I

God is described as "blessed." The epithet is in itself a revelation—of God Himself, in His full, deep, and calm repose; in His strong and exhaustless delight. And the Divine warrant for the application of this epithet to Himself is presented to us in the gospel, and presented there as it is nowhere else.

We might not have anticipated that such a term should at any time be applicable to our God when we think of this devil-possessed world, with its weltering disorder and chaos, its misrule and miseries, its persecutions and wickedness, its "hells upon earth"! And as a matter of fact, the application of this epithet to God is one of the latest reached by man in his effort to describe Him; and it is certainly one of the most difficult for us to hold fast. Paul did not always think of God as "the blessed." His conception of God, derived from the Law of Moses and the traditions of the elders, was that God was just, inflexible, and exceedingly punctilious in His demand of obedience to His laws; partial in His attachment to certain races and classes of men; favouring a select people dwelling in a select land; often invaded by care, and disturbed by anxiety as to the vicissitudes of His great work on the earth. It was not, indeed, until Paul was mellowed by long experience that his conception of God was cleared of all defiling association with the teaching of the Pharisees, and that he was able to apply (as he does twice over in the course of this, one of his latest

writings) the term "blessed" to the Deity, as descriptive of the deep happiness of God Himself, and to assert that the effort to impart that happiness to others increased it for Himself.

Now, Paul had learnt this doctrine of God at the feet of Jesus. He had gone to Jesus, and in the study of His life had found what God really is. He had seen Jesus going about doing good, and healing those that were possessed of the devil; and in the sight he beheld the ceaseless beneficence of the Deity. He had watched the pity of Jesus as He dealt with that woman who was so severely tempted and so sadly fell, and he saw in the pity of Christ the pity of God. He had heard the disciples tell again and again of the way in which Jesus wept tears of sorrow over the doomed city, Jerusalem; and he saw in those tears, as they trickled down the face of Jesus, the tears of God. He listened to the followers of Christ as they told of the great patience with which the Saviour had borne their blunderings and misconceptions, faults and sins; and he saw in the patience of Christ the patience of God. Luke had told him the story of the Prodigal Son, the rapture with which Jesus Christ had recited it in the hearing of the people, how His face shone with the light of the deep joy in His own spirit; and as Paul heard the story he felt that he was learning something of the deep gladness of God. Everywhere and always he saw the joy of God in Christ's redemptive work, and he found that he had put into his hands a Divine warrant for applying this particular

epithet "blessed" to God, who delights in redeeming mankind.

So that God is not to be thought of by us as an eternal "force," a "power that maketh for righteousness," and does not care whether the goal is reached or not; but rather as a Worker who puts His heart into every stroke of His work, and is pained if the stroke fails. God is not to be conceived as an eternal "tendency," as the ancient Epicurean said, or as our modern philosophers report, but as a Person, loving as well as working—working to save, and delighting in saving.

Jehovah is not a sphinx seated in the sandy deserts of the world, sullen and morose, gazing unmoved on the troubles of men; but a kindly nurse, waiting to administer the medicine that He has prepared for the diseases of men. He is not a Jupiter Tonans, thundering through human life; but a kindly God walking with His children, talking to them around their domestic hearth, and giving them the sweet consciousness of fellowship with Himself as the supreme joy of their life. A great thing it was for God to redeem man at all, but it is an infinitely greater thing for Him to find His joy in it. "Mercy is twice blessed"—"it blesses him" that "takes," but it also blesses him who "gives"; and God Himself adds to His own blessedness by the dispensations of His infinite mercy. It quickens His own joy and fills the cup of His own delight to save man; so that He not only commends His love towards us, but He

also commends His blessedness, since it is perfected in the activities of that love for our redemption. Christ died for us not by constraint, but willingly, so that He might bear on His own heart the sin of the whole world, repair our broken and shattered fortunes, and introduce us to eternal righteousness. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," but that joy in the presence of the angels is but the flowing of the tide of the great ocean of Divine delight in the redemption of lost men. God in the gospel is revealed as glad to redeem.

II

Note again that the revelation of God as glad to redeem is the express brightness of His glory, and the full revealing of the perfect radiance of His character. Moses, the ancient seer, uttered the cry, "Shew me Thy glory." The prayer was answered only in part. Young Isaiah stepped into the temple and presented his supplication to God, and was so dazed by the revelation of Divine holiness that he fell upon his knees and put his hand to his lips and cried, "Unclean, unclean." But Paul was able to look with unblenched vision at the soft radiance of God as it shone in the face of Jesus Christ.

The glory of a young man is his strength: the free outflow of his energies, and the conscious use of the forces with which God has endowed him. The glory of mature man is shown in the work in which he

most of all delights, and in which his hand can ply most deftly, and his exultation become a factor in his toil. Raikes revealed his glory when, as a botanist in human nature, he gathered the boys and girls on the Sunday afternoon, taught them the Word of God, and started Sunday schools. The glory of John Howard is shown in the gladness with which he went from prison to prison, to improve the criminal population of Europe. The glory of God is shown in the fact that He delights to save man.

Men ask, Wherein is God most specially and distinctly revealed? If they turn to the ancient Scriptures, they see written over and in them, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" If they turn to the scriptures of science, they see written through them and over them, "God is glorious in the greatness of His strength and in the achievements of His power. He builds world after world, and orders them all so harmoniously that there is no collision amongst them." Others say that God's glory is in His wisdom, as He makes an eye or an arm. Scripture tells us that the glory of God is disclosed chiefly in the delight that He has in repairing our ruined human nature and rebuilding our fallen humanity.

To whom will ye liken this God? To the God of the Assyrians, swift in movement as the eagle, strong as the ox, and keen in intelligence as man? To whom will ye liken Him? To the gods of the Romans—revengeful, passionate, and unjust? To the

gods of the Greeks—dominated by the love of beauty, but lacking love of truth? To whom will ye liken God? To none save Him who is God, to Jesus Christ, who in every step of His march towards the cross reveals the straitened and fettered condition in which He feels Himself because He cannot reach the goal of the world's salvation as speedily as He would. If the work in which man delights reveals the glory or the meanness of the man, surely the work in which God delights must enshrine Him in our hearts as glorious beyond all others. God revealed to us in the gospel, delighting to redeem us men, is God made known to us in the very fulness of His glory.

III

Now God cannot be known as thus glad to redeem without the heart of the gospel being known; and when the heart of the gospel is known, man is saved!

1. He is saved from misgiving as to the freeness and completeness of the Divine pardon. Bunyan tells us, in his *Grace Abounding*, that for years he lived in agony because he could not discover peace with God.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find no repetition of the experience of John Bunyan. The eunuch hears from the lips of Philip the preaching concerning Jesus Christ, becomes a Christian, and is baptized forthwith. Cornelius listens to Peter as he proclaims Christ to him, the Son of that God who is

no respecter of persons, but receiveth every one who fears Him and works righteousness; and he at once accepts the Divine pardon, and is invaded and inspired by the energy of the Holy Ghost. Three thousand on the Day of Pentecost hear of the crucified Jesus as the exalted Lord and Christ, and, listening to and accepting the message, receive salvation from all doubt as to the freeness of God's pardon.

How can you doubt the reality and certainty and adequacy of that pardon when God Himself delights to give it? Why this scepticism about the mercy of God when He has taken so much pains to make it clear that it is His joy to receive you? His mercy endureth for ever. Why should any man hug his sin to himself, as if he could not live in the consciousness of God's full compassion, and in the acceptance of God's free and complete pardon?

2. To know that God is glad to redeem is certainly salvation from all fear and apprehension concerning the continuity of our Christian progress and the final issue of our Christian endeavour. The early Christians were able to say in a perfectly logical and common-sense way, "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." The work in which you delight is not instantly surrendered or broken off midway. Joy keeps you at it, and holds you to your post, and makes it easy for you to persevere to the end. So God, having Himself wrought out for you everlasting salvation in Jesus Christ, will assuredly work in you so that you may "work out your

own salvation," though it may be with much fear and misgiving concerning temptation, but never with a trembling spirit concerning God or the adequacy of His resources. You will say at every stage, "If God be for me, who can be against me?" As He is not appearing as Saviour merely by necessity, or by the misery of the situation, but because of His own delight in repairing the ruined temple and reconstructing His fallen universe, therefore we may say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

3. And if this message be accepted, shall we not also be saved from any misgiving concerning the final overpowering of evil by goodness, and be filled with a Divine content even amidst the manifold miseries and wretchedness of our lot? Shall we complain because we cannot clearly understand all that has taken place in our own day and within our own observation, and speak as though God had ceased to attend to and rejoice in His saving work? No; rather let us find serenity and joy in the thought that God has set Himself with glad-heartedness to the work of universal redemption, that His counsels stand fast, and that His purpose is from generation to generation, and will triumph. So shall we be able to enter into the significance of the saying of Nehemiah, "The joy of the Lord is your stronghold." It is a place into which you can betake yourself when attacked by foes, and find abundant protection. To know the message of

God as it is given in the gospel, to see and feel that He Himself is glad to redeem, that is salvation.

Why, then, should you not rejoice in this salvation now, and live in the consciousness of Divine peace, and in the assurance that God Himself is not distant from you and indifferent to you, but is actually carrying on your training as Jesus Christ did that of His own disciples and followers? Get your doctrine of God where Paul got his, and you will be able to talk about the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, and know that He rejoices in all His work for the completion of your own personal salvation. Could I convince you of this, it would be the beginning of new life for you! Then you might, with the swiftness of the eunuch and the certainty of Cornelius, rather than the slowness of John Bunyan, enter into the full blessedness of the gospel of the Saviour.

IV

But we shall do injustice to our text if we fail to recognise that this incidental statement is so introduced by the apostle as to indicate to us that the selfsame gospel is to him a high ethical standard and an unfailing source of ethical energy. You know the setting of this passage: "According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God." What is it that is to be "according to this gospel"? It is "sound doctrine," says Paul: that is to say, the teaching that makes men sound in moral wind and limb, and fits

them for a robust and manly life. Not sound doctrine in the mischievous mediæval sense of a sound creed. That conception of Paul's teaching has wrought more damage than any other legacy that has come to us from the period of logic chopping and hard metaphysical talk. What is in Paul's mind is the teaching which makes manhood and builds men up in the three qualities that he speaks of in the previous part of this paragraph,—in *love* that is out of a pure heart, in a *good conscience*, and in *faith* that is unfeigned,—teaching which carries men on from all that is hateful and unreal and distrustful to that which is radiant with love, true in its loyalty to God and to conscience, and rich in its repose on the infinite power and grace of Christ.

Those who are familiar with Paul's writings will recognise the facility with which he introduces at different points those words "according to." He wishes to show that there is no limit to "the power" that makes good Christian men of us, and he says that it works in us "according to the power that raised Jesus from the dead." Thus he puts into our hands as a standard test of the Divine grace the great miracle of Christianity! He wishes us to know that we can offer any prayer that comes into our heart that concerns the building up of our character, and he says it will be answered "according to the power that worketh in us," and therefore God will do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. So here he is telling the teachers what they are to teach, and says that the old law gave us a sketch of an ideal man,

but the sketch was imperfect; it required to be completed. The law of Moses set before us a type of manhood which has to be corrected and enlarged by the revelation of the real man, Christ Jesus. That is "sound doctrine"—doctrine which makes men morally and spiritually sound, which enables men to attain to the manhood of Christ.

So this gospel is for Paul a certain rule that he carries about with him to test all teaching. Just as a carpenter carries with him a three-foot rule, and as a man carries a watch with which to measure time, so Paul carries with him this gospel—as a measure of ethical teaching. And he vindicates a position like this by discovering to us the deep delight of God in the redemption of mankind which is calculated to give force to the conscience, to quicken the love of the heart, and perfect the consecration of the man; and any teaching that falls short of this great goal is not "according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

Here, therefore, is revealed to us what we are to do with God's gospel when we have it. It comes to us as a message acquitting us completely of the guilt of our transgressions, and introduces us to peace with God and joy in God. It supplies us with the forces we are to use in making men of ourselves, and in helping forward the manhood of the world.

Such is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. Learn it, accept it, love it, preach it, practise it, until this sublime old gospel is known to everybody, and has become the peace, and strength, and joy of men.

XVII

THE GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS

“For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”—TIT. ii. 11.

“TELL the slaves,” said Paul to Titus, “to be obedient to their masters, because the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to men, and bringing it to all men, slaves and masters alike.”

No task was so irksome, no vocation so exacting as that of the Christian slave. Impossible was it to discover conditions harder than those under which he was living: and it was therefore necessary that his spirit should be cheered, his faith fed, and his heart sustained by the highest truths and nourished by the best bread of God. To us, looking at this advice given to Titus as to the teaching which he should impart to these bondsmen, it seems as if the setting in which the counsel appears was intended as a surprise. The contrast between the trivial round, the common task, and the bold upleap of the spirit into the very presence of the manifested grace of God in its most unique epiphany—in its fullest discovery—is so vivid and

arresting that it looks almost as if it were a rhetorician's device. Like a sudden clap of thunder on a still summer's day, or a flash of lightning on a dark evening, disclosing heights and depths of dazzling splendour, so Paul opens to us from the dingy and murky atmosphere of the lot of a Cretan slave the very doors of heaven, and exhibits to us the infinite beauty of the all-redeeming grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And yet, if we know the Apostle Paul, and are familiar with his habits of thought and speech, we see that this sort of teaching rises out of his conception of Christian duty as naturally as the harvest springs out of the seed that has been sown. Christianity in his mind always keeps its feet fixed upon the solid earth, though its vision soars into the region of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The ends of Christianity are moral. It seeks ethical perfection, although it is in its substance and reality redemptive, a manifestation and achievement of "grace."

Just as the telescope of the astronomer searches the fathomless immensity and discovers planets, stars, and suns kindred to our own, so Christianity searches the heights and depths of universal being, and reveals the Lord and Redeemer of all men; but at the same time it locks the lips of the bondsman, lest he should complain against his master; holds back his fingers from picking and stealing his master's goods or using them for his own ends; and inspires him with a passion to adorn and make beautiful, attractive and magnetic,

"the doctrine" or teaching of God his Saviour in all things.

Indeed, you must suspect the Christianity that is too exalted to vote for a vestryman or for a member of Parliament; that luxuriates in prayer-meetings, and leaves debts unpaid: cons books of devotion, and neglects the dust in the corners of the room and on the frames of the pictures; that finds delight in public worship, and allows or supplies bad cooking in the home; that talks of the "grace of God," and refuses obedience to those who rule us; is eloquent about the philanthropies of life, and is yet flagrantly guilty of violating the first principles of justice in the market and the city. Such a conception of Christianity is not according to Paul's gospel—a gospel which embraces, and saturates as it embraces, every department of human thought and activity with motives drawn from the redemption which is of God in Christ Jesus, and unites human life at the lowest and at every point with the Divine, because it knits the spirit in fellowship with God Himself, through Christ Jesus His Son.

Thus, whilst Christianity is terrestrial, it is also and always celestial; commanding with a masterly grip the things of our temporal life, it also seizes with an unrelaxing hold the things that are eternal. The lowliest ethic has its root in the depths of Deity, and the humblest act gets its inspiration and strength from the brightest vision of God. We cannot be perfectly ethical in thought and deed without being theological. Our moral conceptions and character do not reach their

completion unless we have them pervaded and inspired by the revelation of God. For our human life, from top to bottom, from back to front, is rooted in the grace of God, and in the grace as it is presented to us in its brightest and most luminous epiphany—even in “the Word which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld, and our hands handled.” Christian slaves are to be persuaded to obey their masters; not gain-saying, not purloining, but “showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works.”

The historic Jesus, the true and full manifestation of God as saving all men, is the theme to which Paul calls our attention when he says, “The grace of God has appeared.” Grace! There is no word more vivid, more rich in the whole of our language. Referring to objects that are visible, it describes their sweetness and attractiveness as the beauty of the fragrant lily, or the facile movement of the bounding antelope, or the singular charm and graceful movement in a lovely

woman. Denoting that which is internal, it brings before us kindliness of disposition, goodness of heart, welling up and welling out ceaselessly towards those who most need it and least deserve it, as in the favour shown by a wise prince towards criminal subjects, or the ceaseless ministrations of a nurse towards a patient who is fractious, ungrateful, and almost unbearably irritating under the pressure of racking pains. In its Hebrew development, it acquires a deep and exhaustless significance, for it describes the joy of giving—the joy of a nature that must give, that insists on giving, and can be satisfied only by giving. It describes God as Himself delighting in saving men, in saving lost men; coming into our human life by the lowliest door and into its hardest conditions, for this work of salvation; coming not of constraint, not owing to the propitiation offered by the guilty, not in consequence of anger appeased by the guiltless, but coming out of the glad luxuriance of His own spirit in the exercise of His love towards sinful man; for God commended His love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. No one word in the English language is equivalent to this great word “Grace.” The wealth of the whole historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ is enshrined in it. The great primary and fundamental fact in human history, that God loved the world so much as to give His only begotten Son for our salvation, is set out in this unforgettable term. Our word “goodness” takes us some distance towards its meaning, but it falls short of its wonderful depth and sweetness.

We must add such words as "magnetic," "charming," and "attractive," and import such figures as that of a physician who surrounds a miserly and miserable nature with a whole system of helpful ministrations that gradually get rid of his miseries and bring home to him the very peace and strength and joy of God. It portrays the attitude of God towards a lost race, because it reveals Him not simply as He appears, but as He is in the core of His being, in the deep verity of His nature. God *is* grace, and grace has at length appeared—appeared fully, grandly, with infinite charm and winsomeness. It was before it appeared, and men, moved by the Holy Ghost, caught glimpses of its supernal beauty, and sang of it as higher than the heavens, more enduring than the ages, stronger than man's sin, and forming the unfailing delight of God in His sleepless ministry of mercy to man.

But through the ages prior to the coming of Jesus that grace had not appeared in its fulness. The law came by Moses, but not "grace"—not the very truth and reality of God. The righteous claims of God on the love and service, the trust and obedience of men were fully expressed, but not the "free gift of God" to men of abundant pardon and all-sufficing strength. The "word of the Lord came" by prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and their fellow-seers—and men understood and realised their sin and felt their need of the mercy of God; but the "appearing" of God, gracious and benign, pitiful towards the wretched, plenteous in mercy, full of compassion, saving men from themselves

waited for "the fulness of times," when God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Now, there is no vision of the human race so impressive as its search, generation after generation, after God, feeling after Him if haply He might be found. Man needs religion. He is restless until he is right, and therefore he who creates a religion for him is the most potent of all factors in human history; and he creates a religion who manifests God, and he originates the eternal and universal religion who manifests God in the essential truth of His being, in His unity, His purity, His love, and His grace. Moses created the Hebrew faith by his revelation of the Divine Oneness; and Mahomet founded a religion because he seized the forgotten doctrine of the unity of God, and proclaimed it to a people led away by idols. That doctrine reappeared in him, and it became a great regenerative influence in the world of his time, and for some centuries afterwards. But the revelation of One Eternal Will, momentous as it is in itself and sublime as are its results, fails to meet man's deepest needs, or to bind him to do all he can to save his fellows and ameliorate their lot. The "grace" that does this has appeared in Jesus, and in Him fully, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all wrongdoing, make us His own possession, and flood us with the forces that work for the salvation and progress of the human race. Jesus takes us within the Divine mind.

In seeing Him we see the Father. We no longer stand outside God. The daring figure of the old Hebrew song, "God is our home, our dwelling-place in all generations," becomes a conscious reality, and we see time and all its contents and issues, ourselves and our destiny, from within.

You know what an infinite difference there is between looking on anything from the inside and from the outside. I never forget the first time this fact arrested my thought and fixed itself on my mind. I was wandering about Cologne Cathedral, admiring its massive splendour, its manifold beauties, and thinking of the four hundred years it had been, off and on, in process of building, when my eyes rested on the painted windows; and as I looked at the figures and tried to discern their outline, I found all was chaos and confusion: there was no beauty, no attraction. Then I went inside.

The sun was streaming through, and every window was a paradise of beauty. There stood out clearly the artist's thought, the artist's mind, the artist's soul. Seen from inside, all was lovely. Seen from outside, all was blurred and confused; no thought was conveyed, no pleasure produced. So it had been with the mind of God. Seen from the outside in His vast universe crowded with the proofs of His power, or in human history studded over with glaring and painful contradictions, men have fallen in fear and dread before Him, and asked whether they should not bring their sons and offer them in sacrifice as a peace-offering. They thought of God, not as loving, gracious, and

righteous, but as wrath, and nothing but wrath. When Jesus takes us within the mind of the Father, we behold Him as the God of Righteousness, loving and gracious, bringing redemption to mankind. In the Son the Father is revealed, and revealed as a God infinitely loving and infinitely lovable. For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to man.

That great historic fact, the "appearing" of this poor, uneducated workman of Nazareth for the brief space of some thirty-three years, under humble conditions, in a small country, among an obscure people, silent and hidden for thirty out of the thirty-three years, has had consequences through all history and up into the eternities that we can never describe, and values permanent and universal we can never exhaust. But they all root themselves in this, that Jesus was the only begotten of the Father, and came from the bosom of the Father, from the deepest and closest Divine intimacies, and is therefore the revelation of the heart and mind of God. It is this that gives Him universal worth, permanent value. He is full of "grace"; the "grace" of God "appears" in Him. The men who know Him best feel it most, and are almost overpowered as they behold it set in the burning radiance of stainless purity. They are attracted and awed. His perfect sinlessness is associated with perfect pity, and where the first begets the timid cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," the second inspires the hopeful request, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" John the Baptist, with gloom on

his face, and sternness in his tone, and axe in hand ready to be laid at the root of the tree of Israelitish life, appears the impersonation of righteous severity. Jesus begins His ministry,—where?—at a wedding. He starts His public work at a love festival. He added to its joy; for this beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory—the glory of a Teacher who, while He eclipses the Baptist in His sinlessness, is so matchlessly tender and pitiful towards sinners that He is known amongst fallen outcasts by the invidious but revealing epithet of the “Friend of publicans and sinners.”

Again, what is this noise in the temple so early in the morning? Why is this crowd gathered? A woman is being led by some of the chief religious teachers into the presence of Jesus the Nazarene.

Wherefore? The woman is guilty. She has been apprehended violating the law, and she is brought before Jesus to be judged by leaders in religion who have not so much as a thought of mercy in their hearts, and who are ready, and even eager, to have her stoned according to the law of Moses. But He who tightened all the obligations of morality to an incredible degree turns His eyes towards the woman. Grace is in His mien; gentleness is in His tone; and the message of salvation is on His lips. “Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way: from henceforth sin no more.” But for the brazen hardness of the Pharisees who brought her and asked for her condemnation, who knew no compassion and felt no sorrow,—for them, not for her

poor fallen soul,—He had judgment; and after He had written on the ground, He rose up and said, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her,” and so aroused the slumbering consciences of those self-righteous accusers that they could not endure His presence any longer. Thus the mercy and the judgment of God triumphed together.

Again, Jesus Christ is on the cross. He is being crucified—put to death by men whom He has loved, and whom He has served as their friend and helper in time of trouble. Hark! What is this cry which comes from the cross? It is, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Could grace go further than this? Is it possible for loving-kindness to express itself in circumstances more painful than these? See the Sufferer hanging there; think of His agony as He is stretched on the cross; and yet there comes a prayer for His murderers, for their salvation. Verily the “grace” of God has “appeared” at every point of His brief ministry—in His words and deeds, but never with such unexampled pathos and power as in the petition, “Father, forgive them.”

Recollecting how Jesus appeared, I am warranted in saying that His appearance is not only a manifestation of the grace in the heart of God, but also of the *plan* that God had in the government and administration of human life—a discovery to us of “His eternal purpose, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will,

according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times to sum up all things in Christ." It was the plan of God to redeem. He is the Father of men; and the Incarnation happens because God is Father and in order to the revelation and realisation of Fatherhood in and through the Sonship of Jesus to God, made visible to men in the historic Christ, and also made realisable as a glad personal experience by men through faith in the same Jesus: heirs of God, and joint heirs and brothers with Jesus Christ. So the Master sets men free from all false conceptions of God's rule of men in the long past, and gives them a true interpretation of the life of the race, as well as brings them that Divine force by which they may incarnate the same "grace" in their lives and make it appear in their behaviour.

And if the Christ of history interprets the ages, He also offers a luminous conception of the order characteristic of the life of to-day. For God who manifested Himself as redeeming grace in the history of Jesus has followed on that manifestation, and completed and crowned it in the continuous stream of gracious, holy, and beneficent men and women He has maintained from generation to generation, and in the fact that He still feeds that vast river of moral forces which proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb for the healing of the nations. It is indisputable that Jesus occupies a unique and solitary place as the Creator of the eternal religion. We still debate as to who is the supreme master in philosophy—Plato or

Aristotle, Averroës or Bacon, Locke or Hamilton; we have not yet chosen our king in poetry—Shakespeare, or Milton, or Goethe; we are not of one mind as to the greatest genius in music—Handel, Beethoven, or Mozart; but we have no doubt as to the greatest leader in religion, the first and chief in the building of the manhood of the world. It is absolutely certain that in the department of religion Jesus is alone in the number and variety of the grace-filled men He has created, and in the quality and opulence of the spirit He has inspired to minister grace to a lost world. Here, therefore, in the history of Christ has the grace of God appeared, interpreting the past, enriching the present, and illuminating the future.

Brethren, it is our privilege to sit at the feet of this Saviour. In our quest for God we find Him completely and clearly, so that, as Jesus said to Philip, He says also to you: "See Me, and you see God. See Me, and you see the Father. See Me, and you see not a mere name or label, but you see God Himself in His spirit, His purpose, His will, His administration."

And now let me ask you to remember the saying of the poet—

"Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
If He is not born in thee, thy soul is all forlorn."

The grace of God has appeared, and centuries have elapsed since that appearance. Christ who died rose again, and lives for ever to make intercession for us. The Christ of Bethlehem is exalted to give repentance

and remission of sins to England and to men everywhere, to introduce new thoughts concerning life and the God who gives it to us, to bring to us those powers by means of which it shall be possible for us to become revealers of those newly found thoughts, first in deed and then in speech.

Has Christ been born in you? If not, your soul is all forlorn; you have no well-grounded hope, no immediately available fountain of strength, no sure and certain witness of the final conquest over evil. Are not these your needs? Do you not day after day realise that your deepest want is here? Paul himself could say, looking upon many of his day, that he had travailed in birth for them until Christ was born in them. Jesus waits to be born in you now. He is seeking entrance into your heart. Welcome Him, and then, instead of your soul being all forlorn, you will be enriched with a Saviour, a Friend, a Master—yea, with the fulness of God.

“To hear His word, to feel His grace
Break on my spirit like a tide;
To see His glory in Thy face—
What can I know of God beside?

Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest:
Of all my need Thou art the sum.
My faith in Thee has brought me rest
In God, my soul's eternal home.”

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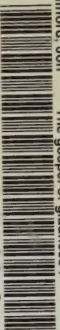
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